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ABSTRACT

In 1990, Miami University of Ohio became the first institution of higher education in the nation to award entering students credit and advanced placement in college composition on the basis of a collection of their best high school writing samples. The student's writing portfolio package consists of four pieces: a reflective letter introducing the writer and the portfolio, a story or description, an explanatory essay, and an analysis of a written text. Each portfolio is read independently by two faculty members of the Department of English specially trained in portfolio writing assessment and scored using a six-point guide. Three to six credits can be awarded based upon the evaluations. Six portfolios are presented, all of them were rated "excellent" by both faculty raters and judged to be truly outstanding--the very best of the 277 portfolios submitted. Appendices include the 1990 scoring guide for portfolios, a description of portfolio contents, guidelines for portfolio submission, and a portfolio cover sheet. (TJH)

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The Best of Miami's Portfolios

Selected and Edited by

Donald A. Daiker
Jeffrey Sommers
Gail Stygall
Laurel Black

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of

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c 1990

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We are grateful to the colleagues and institutions who have made Miami's program in portfolio assessment possible.

Oxford, Ohio

Donald A. Daiker
Jeffrey Sommers
Gail Stygall
Laurel Black

Introduction

In 1990 Miami University became the first institution of higher learning in the nation to award entering students credit and advanced placement in college composition on the basis of a collection of their best high school writing. Miami University's optional Portfolio Writing Assessment Program has two major goals: 1) to provide a fair and accurate measure of a student's writing ability and 2) to support and encourage writing teachers and the teaching of writing at high schools in Ohio and across the country.

A Miami University writing portfolio consists of four pieces: 1) a reflective letter introducing the writer and the portfolio; 2) a story or description; 3) an explanatory essay; and 4) an analysis of a written text. For a detailed description of each piece, together with submission guidelines, please see Appendix B and C at the end of this volume. Each portfolio is read independently by two faculty members of the Department of English specially trained in portfolio writing assessment. The readers follow a 6-point scoring guide developed specifically for the Miami University portfolio program. The 1990 Scoring Guide is included as Appendix A.

Students whose portfolio is rated "very good" or "excellent" (a score of "5" or "6") earn six credits in college composition and completely fulfill their university writing requirement. Students whose portfolio is rated "good" (a score of "4") receive three credits in college composition, partially fulfill their writing requirement, and receive advanced placement (ENG 113). Students whose portfolio is rated "fair" or lower enroll in two semesters of College Composition (ENG 111 and 112). In 1990, approximately 45% of the students submitting a writing portfolio received either three or six credits in college composition.

The six portfolios included in this volume* were not only rated "excellent" by both faculty raters but were judged to be truly outstanding, the very best of the 277 portfolios submitted. So it is important to realize that many, many portfolios that fell short of the writing quality represented here in fact earned college credit. We hope that students who write well will not be discouraged from submitting a portfolio by these exceptional collections of writing. Indeed, our hope is that they will inspire students and teachers alike to produce better work than ever before.

* Each portfolio was orginally no more than 12 pages. But in the process of preparing them for publication, we standarized the type face and margins, and added the authors' introductions and readers' comments. As a result of these changes, some of these portfolios now exceed the page limit.

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Portfolio by Jennifer Beyersdorf

Northville High School
Northville, Michigan

Author's Introduction

Hi. I'm Jenny and currently a freshman at Miami. I'm a political science/ English-journalism double major from Northville, Michigan.

Northville has one high school with 1200 students, so Miami—with its 16,000+ students—seems huge to me. Seeking out help and actively pursuing my interests, however, have helped me find the small-school, small town feeling that I grew up with.

In high school I played soccer, debated, was a class and National Honor Society officer, and editor of The Mustanger—our newspaper.

This semester at Miami, I'm working ten hours a week as an intern at a local newspaper, The Oxford Press, and also writing for Miami's newspaper, The Student. Although I'm not playing soccer here, I'm going to coach Oxford's local middle school team next fall.

I love my classes (except microbiology) and although adjusting to school was harder than I expected, I can now honestly say that I'm loving college and looking forward to the rest of my time here at Miami.

Reflective Letter

My creative writing teacher, Ms. Dorian Sandbothe, always used to tell us that writing was simply "how you look on paper." This fact worries me. While I don't lack confidence in my writing ability, I do think that my choices of genre and topics may not always reveal my full potential as a writer or my entire personality.

Although I have strong creative urges, for example, when I write, I tend to use essays as my forum and political commentary as my subject matter. I was probably the only student in Ms. Dorrian's creative writing class who turned her interpretation of

an art work assignment into an essay on the fall of communism in Eastern Europe (it was an abstract painting). But I am trying to overcome my narrow-minded approach. I wrote "Uncle Larry," for instance, as my informal essay for Ms. Dorrian when I could have just as easily written about the advantages of socialized medicine. And my brief experiment with poetry did result in a few honorable mentions in some local writing contests and much praise from my teacher. My essay on political candidates and the media, however, took first place in Wayne State University's writing contest—a fact that I remind Ms. Dorrian of frequently when she urges me to write more poetry.

Maybe Ms. Dorrian's definition of writing worries me because it has made me realize that on paper I must not look, therefore must not be, romantic or imaginative. I mean, all I write about for classes are political events, philosophical theories, or literary works. And while these do accurately represent a fairly large part of who I am and what interests me, I know they are not all I have to offer as a writer. I think they're okay, mind you—but wait until you read what I still have to say about life and love and sadness and joy. For then and only then will anyone truly see the way all of me looks on paper.

Uncle Larry

"It's great Uncle Larry, really—great" (I can't tell if he's joking or not).

"Thanks, Jen. It's pretty weird for me, you know. I've never even had a car with a backseat. Now I've got room for seven plus a luggage rack. We'll be thankful for the room, though, once the baby arrives."

"Yeah, I guess you're right" (he's not joking). I fondle the mini-van's fake wood trim as Uncle Larry rubs the last of the Turtle Wax onto the fender. "So what are you gonna do with your RX-7?" I casually inquire. "I'll be sixteen next month, you know. I'd really hate to see that car leave the family."

"Nice try, Jen, but your dad would kill me. Besides, I think you should get something bigger for your first car—maybe drive Grandpa's old Grenada for awhile?"

I laugh; Uncle Larry doesn't. "You're serious?"

"Yeah, why not? It's big and safe, and it won't let you go too fast, just what you need."

I sigh and study my uncle's face. He doesn't look any older, but he surely is acting weird. In fact, ever since he married Aunt Kimberly, I've noticed a change in his personality: a gradual loss of coolness accompanied by a rapid increase in nerdiness. In fact, lately he's reminded me of Dad.

Before he got married, Uncle Larry used to pick me up from school in his red Mazda. We'd cruise the San Diego Freeway to Grandma and Grandpa's; he always used to clear his throat and spit

out the window. Then he'd put the top down and give me an extra pair of sunglasses—"We're cool, Jen, we're cool."

And sometimes we'd walk to Turmaline Hill, the best surfing park in Pacific Beach. Uncle Larry knew everyone's name down there. He "knew how to surf before he knew how to walk" is what he told everyone. Since he hurt his knees skiing last year, he hasn't gone down as much, but I still ask him to take me. I know how he loves the ocean.

We'd sit on the red clay rocks overlooking the beach and watch his wetsuited friends for hours. Once, Grandma came looking for us to tell us we'd missed dinner. So we went to Jack-In-The-Box for thirty-nine-cent tacos. We tried skipping family meals about four or five times after that, but Grandma caught on and gave Uncle Larry a lecture about punctuality, nutrition, and the dangers of Turmaline Beach at night.

We always used to "rebel" together. Two years ago, right before Christmas, Uncle Larry and I flew up to San Francisco for the day and walked around Berkeley. He showed me where he used to serve breakfast in the basement of the girls' dorm, and he took me to his frat house, Bowle's Hall, where we slid down the ancient oak railings. The University of California's still number one on my college list.

As I look at him now, waxing his mini-van with suburbanite glee, I wonder what could've happened. Marriage I guess. Grandma's thrilled that "Larry's finally taking responsibility for his life." And Mom and Dad say Aunt Kimberly's really made him grow up. All I know is that I haven't been to Turmaline Hill

since the wedding.

Uncle Larry stands up and examines his finished project. "Looks mighty nice, huh Jen? Finished just in time for dinner."

"Yup—wouldn't want to be late," I mumble, but he's already turned and doesn't hear me. I pick up the spilled can of Turtle Wax and carefully screw on the lid.

"Hurry up, Jen," he calls, his back still turned. "After dinner we'll ride out to Turmaline Hill and watch the surfers."

But somehow I know it won't be the same. Spitting out the window of a mini-van just isn't cool.

Political Candidates and the Media—
The Double Standard Continues

American political scandal began in colonial times. Thomas Jefferson had a child out of wedlock with his black mistress. Grover Cleveland, too, reportedly fathered an illegitimate boy. Benjamin Franklin was a well-known philanderer, and Dwight Eisenhower, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson, John Kennedy, and Martin Luther King Jr. womanized throughout their lives. Kennedy even had an affair with Judith Campbell, mistress of mafia boss Sam Giancana. And, on at least one occasion, John and Jackie Kennedy smoked marijuana in the White House. While the

public did not encourage or condone such behavior, personal indiscretions did not significantly harm these political careers. In contrast, in March of 1987 Gary Hart, 1988 Democratic presidential frontrunner, withdrew his candidacy after reporters revealed an alleged affair between the former Colorado senator and Donna Rice, a Miami model. Despite his reentry into the race nine months later, Hart's supporters, campaign funds, and chances of winning the nomination were lost, and a promising political career ended. In October of the same year, Joseph Biden dropped out of the Democratic race after the press revealed that Biden exaggerated his educational background and plagiarized a speech. And only a month later, Douglas Ginsberg, President Reagan's second nomination for the open supreme court seat, admitted marijuana use in the sixties, and, after urging from the Secretary of Education, withdrew himself from the race. It remains unclear whether this trend results from scandal-hungry media or a new morality in America regarding political candidates. Regardless of the reasons, the well of possible future leaders continues to run dry because Americans have suddenly made lifelong perfection a prerequisite for holding political office.

"Live...from Washington D.C...it's Meet Your Candidate, the first annual televised Mr. Democrat 1992 contest. Watch with us as this year's contenders approach the stage. You, at home, get your scorecards ready as Donna announces results of the lie-detector, blood, and urine tests, taken yesterday afternoon. It's gonna be a close race this year, Ron. Who do you see as the early favorite?"

"Well, Dick, you've got to like Jim Bowman. He's young, only thirty-eight, and although he lacks the educational background, knowledge, and experience, he did pass his lie-detector test, and so far we can find no records of previous drug or alcohol use."

"That's great, Ron. You know, I really did like Iacocca. He had the knowledge, experience, and leadership ability. It's a shame that those two speeding tickets from 1944 were revealed by the press yesterday. But hey, we can't have a president who broke the law as a teenager. Those impulses to exceed the legal speed limit just may resurface if a conflict with the Russians occurred. We can't have a man like that in control of the button!"

"I agree, Dick. We'll have to cut to a commercial, but stay tuned for character witnesses, the presentation of legal records, and personal profiles of each candidate."

Granted, the former scenario may sound extreme, but in light of recent events, it is not. The fall of Hart's campaign illustrated how media scrutiny can hurt not only the candidate but, in the long run, the country. Some say that the public must like a candidate personally to support him or her, but H. Kamlet, a Hart campaign organizer, disagrees. He states that "None of these guys do you work for because you love all their characteristics as human beings. I never idolized Gary Hart. I respected him as a boss. I saw him as a vehicle for policy change. He had a lot of the answers, and I feel sorry for the country that he's out of the race." Gary Hart made mistakes in his personal life. Because of this, the press treated him like an outcast, a criminal. When did this country begin punishing people

for imperfection? After the accusations about Hart's character forced the withdrawal of his presidential candidacy, bitter campaign organizers stated in Newsweek that "The next president of the United States has just been assassinated by the media" (54). And "Gary Hart has been politically stoned to death, judged by Islamic law" (55).

Like Hart, Joseph Biden was persecuted for past imperfections. The media justifies exploiting candidates' personal lives by linking such issues to the politicians' political views. But where does the line get drawn? After destroying one career over infidelity, the press, searching for scandalous material on other Democratic contenders, reported that Biden plagiarized parts of a speech and once exaggerated his educational background. Biden probably would have lost the Democratic nomination, but this does not excuse jeopardizing a reputation and career for the sake of selling newspapers. Claiming freedom of the press is too often a copout and an abuse of first amendment rights. Having a right to publicize damaging personal details does not make it fair or necessary. The indiscriminate and unethical reporting and publishing of any aspect of a candidate's life makes the Washington Post and New York Times as respectable as The National Enquirer. The double standard which allows revelation of personal facts, whether relevant to the issues or not, is political backstabbing, and to assure a fair political system, must be curtailed.

Another example of the press's fascination with a candidate's past involves Vice President Dan Quayle. The issue of Quayle's

using family influence to evade combat-duty during the Vietnam War made front page news for weeks during the fall of 1988, as did questions about his collegiate academic record and summer job experience. Although some feel these issues deserve attention, giving front page coverage to such matters inevitably relegates the federal deficit, nuclear arms control, and the environment to page 11F, and one wonders how many people went to the voting booth on November 8th thinking not about which candidate could best handle economic problems, but who was more likely to cheat on his wife.

The media argues that they simply report the information at hand. But many politicians, especially in light of recent events, claim the press searches for scandal. Gary Hart, in Newsweek on May 18, 1987, says the presidential nominating system, "is just a mockery that reduces the press of this nation to hunters, and presidential candidates to being hunted. And if it continues to destroy peoples' integrity and honor, then that system will eventually destroy itself" (55). Others claim that in its quest for "the truth," the American media has focused all its attention away from the issues. Jonathan Alter, a reporter for Newsweek, writes, "if the have-you-committed adultery question becomes standard, it will victimize far more often than enlighten, and the press risks becoming obsessed with something that may not be as relevant to a candidate's suitability for office as other character defects, not to mention his position on the issues" (56).

A political cartoon in The Detroit News portrays a baby

dressed in a judicial robe with an aide explaining to President Reagan that "He doesn't have a lot of courtroom experience, but we checked his background and he's clean" (16A). The irony in this is that the press satirizes a problem which it created: the inherent inadequacy of virtually all political candidates given the newly-imposed expectations. The frightening aspect of this trend is the elimination of boundaries limiting the press. Representative Robert Davis, a Democrat from Gaylord in the Michigan Senate, said in The Detroit News, "I can see us getting to the point where you're going to start asking me if I've had one too many drinks or have I ever exceeded the speed limit or those kind of things" (16A). If the media had investigated the private lives of Thomas Jefferson, John Kennedy, Dwight Eisenhower, or virtually every political candidate throughout history, many of our greatest leaders would never have won an election. Imagine the difference in this country if Thomas Jefferson, Dwight Eisenhower, Benjamin Franklin, or Martin Luther King Jr. were persecuted for their "improper" behavior. Who knows if Gary Hart, Joe Biden, or Douglas Ginsberg could have become the next Benjamin Franklin, because only time will reveal the full extent of damage done by the unrealistic standards placed on political candidates.

The Importance of Soul

as Illustrated by

Aldous Huxley's Brave New World

The Random House American Dictionary defines soul as "The thinking and feeling of man; the essential qualities." But what determines an essential quality? And what distinguishes the "thinking and feeling" of the soul from the reasoning capabilities of animals or computers? These questions reveal the pitiful inadequacy of the dictionary definition. The soul encompasses everything that makes each person unique. It produces creativity, feeling, and ambition. It not only causes growth and achievement in an individual but also serves as the root of society's inefficiencies and problems. In Brave New World, Aldous Huxley demonstrates the importance of the human soul through characterization of Lenina, Bernard Marx, and John Savage, individuals in a soul-less society. Through his portrayal of Lenina, who lacks a soul, Bernard, who possesses a fraction of one, and John, who retains all of the essential qualities, Huxley illustrates the lives of three friends possessing varying amounts of that abstract idea known as soul.

Huxley uses the life of Lenina, a typical member of his future society, as a symbol of the quality of life for a human devoid of soul. Lenina's material life flourishes in the Brave New World. As an attractive Beta with a good job, unlimited sexual partners, pleasant surroundings, and an endless supply of Soma, Lenina's

life and the lives of the other soul-less individuals seem quite good on a superficial level. Yet Huxley, through Lenina, repeatedly demonstrates the lack of today's morals and the absence of true feeling in this future society. As an alternative to real emotions, Lenina and her contemporaries take violent passion or pregnancy substitutes. And instead of associating pain or sadness with death, conditioning makes it an unemotional, insignificant event. In another example of the soul-less society's difference in morals, Lenina and Fanny discuss the unconventional, monogamous, two-month relationship between Lenina and Henry Forster. Fanny convinces Lenina that she should see other men. "Yes," says Lenina, "everyone belongs to everyone else. You're quite right, Fanny. I'll make the effort" (29). Huxley consistently points out that despite the order, peace, and apparent happiness of the soul-less society, it noticeably lacks "unproductive" or "dangerous" concepts such as monogamy, love, creativity, and freedom.

Bernard Marx, an Alpha-caste member, possesses a bit more soul than Lenina and the others in the Brave New World. Whether a result of the alcohol added during his gestation period or simply the inability to create a totally soul-less society, Bernard's "flaws" prove the existence of a few essential qualities. Early in the book, Bernard disdains promiscuity and refuses offers of Soma. He does not crave the games of the Brave New World and astonishes Lenina when he wants to take a walk so that they can spend time together. Unlike his peers, Marx blushes when talking to women. When Lenina asks him out in a crowded elevator, he

nervously suggests that they discuss it somewhere else. "As though I'd been saying something shocking," says Lenina. "He couldn't have looked more upset if I'd made a dirty joke" (39). All of these characteristics, in addition to Bernard's realization of and resentment toward subliminal conditioning, illustrate that he differs from the status quo in his future society. What distinguishes him from John Savage, however, is Bernard's later acceptance of his peers' values as he receives recognition from society, amounting to the eventual loss of any essential qualities he may have possessed.

Bringing his examples of the importance of soul full circle, Huxley introduces John Savage to the Brave New World. Like Bernard, John also retains all the essential qualities. But while the pressures of the future society cause Bernard to lose any soul he may have had, John's soul remains intact and, ironically, causes his self-imposed isolation and eventual death. Some may falsely conclude, after the death of John, that Huxley believes humans' problems stem from their souls. Actually, Huxley foreshadows the downfall of society as we know it, as society possessing soul, if we allow a Brave New World to exist. He points out not that John's soul forced him to die but that his soul made him choose to die in such a world. The Brave New World does not live up to John's preconceived ideas, implanted in him by his mother, Linda. He dislikes the feelies that he and Lenina attend, the promiscuity and forwardness of women, and the midget twins who work at the factories. On a tour of one of the factories, Huxley writes that after viewing the midgets, "The

Savage had broken away from his companions and was violently retching behind a clump of laurels, as though the solid earth had been a helicopter in an air pocket" (108). This disgust stems from those essential qualities uniquely John's in the Brave New World. His soul makes him different from the future society; it makes him unique, it makes him feel, and it makes him choose to reject a society lacking these same characteristics.

The importance of soul serves as part of the theme in Brave New World, and Huxley develops this theme through characterization of Lenina Crowne, Bernard Marx, and John Savage. The death of John Savage illustrates Huxley's disdain for his future society and signifies the demise of our humanness should we create such a world. The book warns us that if technology and the collapse of traditional morals advance at their current rates, we would possibly attain a superficially happier and more productive lifestyle, but we would undoubtedly sacrifice our souls in the process. Perhaps the Bible (a book outlawed in the Brave New World) paraphrases Huxley's idea best when it asks, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" [Matthew 16:26]. The Brave New World is the answer.

Readers' Comments on Jennifer Beyersdorf's Portfolio

"Shows nice range--from a detailed character sketch to a formal literary piece," one reader said. Readers liked the distinctive voice and sophisticated sentence structure of the reflective letter, and the fine details and excellent dialogue of "Uncle Larry." But they were especially impressed by the substance, focus, and significance of "Political Candidates and the Media." One reader said, "This is mature writing, with the sources integrated well." Another praised the mock dialogue and good, clear examples. A third said, "we can hear the writer's voice even in this political piece." The analysis of Brave New World, "The Importance of Soul," was praised as a "solid and substantial essay about a disturbing book."

Portfolio by Emily Eaton

Minnehaha Academy
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Author's Introduction

It is said that pictures say a thousand words: I prefer to use a thousand words to create a picture. I enjoy writing, but I have many other interests.

In high school I participated in varsity sports, drama and student activities, and my hobbies include downhill skiing, tennis and travel. I have lived in Italy and Australia and I hope to study in Europe someday.

I am an architecture major here at Miami University. I have always wanted to be an architect, and this past summer I worked in an architectural firm in my hometown of Minneapolis, Minnesota.

I graduated from Minnehaha Academy in Minneapolis. My high school English teacher, Ms. Carolyn Forsell, is the one person whom I credit my improvement as a writer. I am grateful for her help with this portfolio project as well as the encouragement she has given me over the years.

Reflective Letter

To the Miami University English Teachers:

Why do I write? Who am I as a writer? I wish I could tell you; I wish I knew. Perhaps the obstacle is that I am not "a writer." I am a person who enjoys writing, perhaps more than anyone I know. I like to write, but not for words or expression or "to purge myself" as many people claim. I write because it is a medium of creativity. I am not a writer; I am not an artist. I am a Creator. I create pictures and ideas and concepts.

Each of the selections I have chosen to send you is one of my favorite pieces. My prose essay, titled "Jane," began as a simple

description exercise in my Advanced Composition class. Each of the eight students in the class was given a picture of a person to describe. My character came alive for me. I just knew how she was feeling and what her life had been like. I became so intrigued by this character I later wrote a one-act play about her.

The analysis of written text I have submitted is a condensed version of my senior term paper. The enclosed notes and drafts may help you understand what a big project this was. Although this is one of my least favorite forms of writing, I became interested in the interpretation aspect, and, I admit it, I actually enjoyed writing my term paper.

The explanatory essay, titled "Motivation," was possibly the most difficult piece I have ever written. I wrote it for an Advanced Composition assignment. "Write an essay of definition," Ms. Forsell instructed, "...on an abstract concept." She gave us examples: evil, truth, justice, integrity, wisdom. Nothing inspired me. I began by browsing through a book of quotes. I was overwhelmed. I read quotes about truth and wisdom. Nothing. Then, after reading page after page of quotes on every abstract concept I could think of, I finally came across something that interested me. Hidden in the quotes on "hope," I found Latitia E. Landon's definition: "A more gentle name for fear."

Now I was onto something. Fear. I was impressed by the size of the word. I thought of the angles I could take.

"What's the quote? 'Nothing to fear but fear itself...'?" I thought. I knew it was wrong. I remembered a poem I wrote in

sixth grade:

Fear. It stands there
looking at you.
Laughing.
Because you don't know how bad
it really is.

"No," I thought again. I looked it up in Webster's. I looked it up in Roget's. Nothing. Just words. Then, I came across a quote by Henry Link: "[Fear is] nature's warning signal to get busy."

Now I had a focus. Fear as a motivator. I thought this over. Why do people take risks or push themselves to be the best? The answer: Because they are afraid of what will happen if they don't. I now had my definition. Now, how could I write an essay about it? I went through many drafts and numerous readings with my teacher.

"It's close," she said every time. "The idea is there, but you must be more specific, more definitive. You must not merely explain it, you must define it." I was past the point of frustration. I was determined to get it right; I wanted people to read my essay and understand "fear" in a new way.

Finally, I got it right. The third item in this portfolio is my definition of Fear.

Well, that's it. Who I am as "a writer." I hope you enjoy reading my work as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Jane

Jane Jordan hated alarm clocks. She rolled over with a low groan and punched the snooze button.

Ten micro-minutes later Jane knew she must get up. She opened her eyes and once again was faced with daily shock of seeing the left side of the bed empty. It had been almost a year since Ben died, yet Jane refused to let go of the hope that one day she would wake up in his arms and hear him say, "It was all just a bad dream, darling..."

No such luck this morning. She had a job interview downtown, and the employment agency had begged her to put some effort into her appearance today. They said she had a good shot at this one, but then again, they said that about every interview.

She swung her once-athletic legs around to the floor and slowly rose to a sitting position. She looked forward at the full length mirror and felt her stomach lurch. That could not possibly be her reflection. She was beautiful once—Ben told her that every day. But now, the sight before her was that of a rapidly decaying corpse. At least it's appropriate, Jane observed. Ben took the life out of me when he died.

She stood and took a step toward the mirror for inventory. Her hair, which she had always "highlighted," showed a distinct line where her neglected roots had grown in mousy brown. It fell in clumps from a haphazard center part to her shoulders. She had been meaning to get it cut but somehow never got around to it.

Her face was colorless; her forehead creased with worry lines.

Her eyes were empty brown, swollen and bloodshot; she had probably been crying in her sleep again. Her mouth, which had once been so quick to smile, now had a perpetual frown of unhappiness.

Jane's shoulders drooped as if her burdens in the past year had been physical. Her body was generally saggy, as if her skin had suddenly become too heavy for her bones. Her open nightshirt revealed the gaping 16-year-old scar across her abdomen.

The doctor had warned them about having children, but she and Ben had dreamed of having kids since they were married. Their son Stewart was the only part of Ben Jane had left, and she never regretted the difficulties they suffered in order to have him.

Jane pulled a faded sky-blue terrycloth robe over her plaid shirt and padded into the kitchen. She poured herself a mug of steaming coffee, grateful she had remembered to set the timer the night before.

She looked up as the front door opened and her son walked in. He looked at her defiantly before turning into his bedroom.

"Stewart? Where were you all night?" Jane cried wearily before his door slammed, but she knew it was no use.

"Stewart, I love you...,' she whispered, mostly to herself.

She dumped her lukewarm coffee into the sink and went slowly back to her room. She hesitated only briefly before crawling back into the still-warm womb of her bed.

She could not possibly go to a job interview today.

Motivation

The one permanent emotion of the inferior man...is fear—fear of the unknown, the complex, the inexplicable. What he wants beyond everything else is safety.

H. L. Mencken

"What are you afraid of?"

That is what he asked me. I met him when I was probably six or seven years old.

"What are you afraid of?"

That question chased me for years. I always had several answers for him, yet to every one he offered no solution.

"So do something about it, boy!"

"What are you afraid of?"

"Girls!" I answered with my proud ten-year-old voice.

"So do something about it, boy!"

I learned how to talk to girls. I even went steady a few times.

"What are you afraid of?"

"College," I snapped in frustration. I didn't see much of him during high school. I had girlfriends and football practice. I didn't have time for an old man.

"So do something about it, boy!"

I worked hard in school and graduated at the top of my class. I won a scholarship and did well at the University.

"What are you afraid of?"

"My future," I said quietly.

"So do something about it, boy!"

I went to Med School. I did well. I became a pediatrician.

"What are you afraid of?"

"Being alone," I admitted. I didn't see much of him those days. I was too busy with my practice.

"So do something about it, boy!"

I fought the urge to point out I was no longer a boy. I got married. I even had a couple kids.

"What are you afraid of?"

The question was no longer asked by the old man. He had long since passed away.

The question now came from within myself.

"What are you afraid of?"

"My life."

"WHY?" I wanted to scream at the top of my lungs. Why? Why was I afraid of my life? Why was I now worried about my past as well as my future? Why was I afraid of life?

"Because it is almost over."

Truth knocked the wind out of me. I had gone my whole life

fearing the future, and now there was nothing left to fear but death.

"What are you afraid of?"

"Girls, college, my future, being alone."

Fear.

Fear, I now realize, is a motivator; "nature's warning signal to get busy" (Henry Link). Fear orders one to make a decision: live life or merely observe it. Fear is like adrenaline shooting through one's veins. Too much and it is paralyzing, but the right amount gives one the strength to do amazing things.

Fear is "a feeling that is stronger than love" (Pliny 2), which is true, but unlike love, one feels compelled to destroy their fear. I attacked my fear like a physical challenge. The challenge, however, is now a victory, for "to conquer fear is the beginning of wisdom" (Bertrand Russell).

"What are you afraid of?"

Nothing.

Transforming Information: Saul Bellow's Africa

A person without identity is a person without purpose. Eugene Henderson in Saul Bellow's Henderson the Rain King is such a

person. He begins as a man overwhelmed by violence with a violent want to terminate this trait. He goes through a metamorphosis; the result is not a transformation, as Henderson felt he needed, but merely a process of informing himself on his true self. In the end he learns that the understanding of his personal identity does not require a transformation, but information.

Eugene Henderson is a violent, intense man. In a situation that could be easily resolved if handled rationally, Henderson complicates matters to the point of chaos with violence. When his former tenants left their cat behind, Henderson could have simply given the cat to his hired hand. Instead, he sent a registered letter to the cat's legitimate owners and gave them a deadline. This deadline missed, Henderson continued with his violent plan.

> There was plenty of light in the small wallpapered attic room. I said to the tom cat, "They've cast you away, kitty." He flattened himself to the wall, arched and bristling. I tried to aim at him from above and finally had to sit on the floor, sighting between the legs of a bridge table which was there. In this small space, I didn't want to fire more than a single shot. ...Thus I got the center of his head under my (somewhat twisted) forefinger, and fired, but my will was not truly bent on his death, and I missed [p.92].

Henderson feels that he is one of the many people in the world who are simply in the wrong place in life, as he explains "nobody truly occupies a station in life anymore. There are mostly people

who feel that they occupy the place that belongs to another by rights. There are displaced people everywhere" [p.34]. Displaced, Henderson's purpose in life has been clouded. Henderson's displacement brings feelings of despair as he realizes he has become a prisoner of fear and desire.[1]

Henderson lacks the ability to make sense in the world, and he does not have the communication skills necessary to relate to his community.[2] Thus we learn that this deficiency is his motivation to compensate with violence, fueled by a desperate "wanting" that becomes the driving force of his life. He desperately searches for something to stop the wanting, but is unsuccessful. "Now I have already mentioned that there was a disturbance in my heart, a voice that spoke there and said, I want, I want, I want!" [p.24].

Henderson wants to be transformed. He senses that he is too physical so attempts a pursuit of a quieter life. He attacks the medium of violin playing, yet this becomes a violent serenade to his dead parents. He plays the delicate tool, "clutching the neck of the instrument as if there were strangulation in [his] heart" [p.30].

Henderson's attempts at normalcy may be unusual, but one cannot "discount Henderson because he is eccentric and askew. His torment persuades us otherwise. He may be grotesque, but his sufferings are real and significant."[3]

Henderson's sufferings lead to the need for a transformation, and he sees an opportunity in Africa. This adventure is Henderson's "winging his way to the Dark Continent in search of light."[4] Henderson's search for light is unsuccessful with the

Arnewi, his first African hosts. He assumes their frog dilemma as his own, and pledges to exterminate them.

> My heart was already fattening in anticipation of their death. We hate death, we fear death, but when you get right down to cases, there's nothing like it. I was sorry for the cows, yes, and on the humane side I was fine...but still I hungered to let fall the ultimate violence on these creatures in the cistern [p.89].

The intensity of Henderson's drive to rid the tribe of the frogs is so extreme that once again violence eliminates victory. Henderson fails. He has come half way around the world searching for something to transform him into a different, gentler person, and his first attempt in doing this is a disaster.

Henderson is devastated as he realizes "the victory over realities of physical need is not the final battle; that there is another obstacle...the reality of death."[5] He tries to avoid the fact that the Arnewi could die from his mistake, a mistake caused by his own violence. Henderson has impressed people his whole life by his strength, money, and power; suddenly he is with people who look beyond these. The Arnewi people value the "grun-tu-molani," a man's want to live. Henderson craves an understanding of this concept; unfortunately, he is still the violent, passionate man he was back in Connecticut.

Henderson is heartbroken as he leaves the Arnewi, "having demolished both their water and [his] hopes" [p.112]. He is devastated by the fact that his physical superiority is

insufficient. He is crushed emotionally because his desire to transform into a gentle person cannot be quenched. "I may be nothing but an old failure, having muffed just about everything I put my hand to; I seem to have the Midas touch in reverse..." [p.113], he explains to Romilayu, his African guide and companion.

Henderson eventually works his way into the world of the Wariri tribe and into his personal enlightenment. Until now, Henderson has had several problems, but the one causing him the most suffering is "...the clutter and confusion of the mind of a man unwilling or unable to see himself without illusions and without the need for mad, furious constructions to support those illusions."[6]

Henderson must now clear away those illusions that he has been stumbling over. This clearing away is physical and emotional as Henderson learns the rites of the Wariri tribe, befriends their affluent leader, and moves the goddess Mummah. Mummah is the goddess of the clouds, and when Henderson passes her test, the clouds which have enveloped him in his world evaporate. When the rains come, Henderson is washed clean of his old self and his true inner self is exposed. He is now purged of his confusion and has the potential for a new understanding of humanity, where before he had no space in his cluttered mind.

Henderson, like Adam standing naked in the Garden of Eden, is initially embarrassed and uncomfortable with this dramatically graphic revelation. At this point, Henderson is so overwhelmed with these events, he has trouble comprehending anything, let alone his new title of Rain King. Henderson now seeks the counsel

of the leader of the Wariri tribe, King Dahfu, who plays the role of a "pseudo-Socrates."[7] Dahfu comes to the conclusion that Henderson, if he is to have a fulfilling, satisfying life, has to come to terms with his imminent death. Consequently, Dahfu initiates a series of "lion lessons." With practice, Henderson becomes familiar with the intimidating beast, and in a sense, "becomes" the beast. This is again a purge of the violent, primal emotions he has lived with his whole life. As he bellows and screams, his pent-up emotions escape and leave behind the raw personality of a gentle, caring person.

Now Henderson thrives in his enlightenment. His change is now complete, but is not a transformation. It is merely an improvement of what was already there. It is the result of a series of informative events that lead Henderson to the realization that he is <u>not</u> a prisoner to his sufferings. He is finally satisfied, and for the first time in years, is void of his nagging "want." The reader now sees the hero going home the victor, a man who has successfully achieved peace and contentment.

Henderson is now what he has always longed to be: calm. The former Henderson would have never befriended a lonely child on an airplane; similarly, the present Henderson would never see a dead woman in his kitchen and come to the conclusion that the logical thing to do would be to pin a "DO NOT DISTURB" sign on her skirt.

The Henderson that the reader comes to know at the end of the novel is not a different person. He is Eugene Henderson of Connecticut, but he is not violent, self-conscious, or impatient. He was once such a person, but was not happy. He went to Africa

for a transformation: a 100% change. Instead, he experienced an education in himself, a string of events which brought out his true personality. He learned he was made up of many things: the Arnewi's "grun-tu-molani," the Dahfu's lioness, and even a bit of Rain King. But his most important discovery is that he is himself, and he is an amalgamation of many things. He is no longer a prisoner; he does not feel the voice saying "I want! I want!" and he is not violent. Henderson has now been stripped, purged, restructured, and recycled; but he is still Henderson, and he is happy.

Endnotes

1. Carlos Baker, "To the Dark Continent," New York Times Book Review, 27 Feb. 1959:4-5; rpt. Dictionary of Literary Biography: Documentary Series vol. 3, ed. Mathew J. Bruccoli (Detroit: Gale Research, 1983) 15.

2. Earl Rovit, Saul Bellow, University of Minnesota pamphlets on American Writers, no. 65 (St. Paul: North Central Publishing, 1967) 39.

3. Daniel B. Marin, "Saul Bellow," ed. Jeffrey Helterman, vol. 2 of the Dictionary of Literary Biography ed. Mathew J. Bruccoli (Detroit: Gale Research, 1978) 45.

4. Baker 15.

5. R.R. Dutton, Saul Bellow in the Twayne's United States Authors Series, ed. Sylvia E. Bowman (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1971) 109.

6. Dutton 112.

7. Rovit 19.

Readers' Comments on Emily Eaton's Portfolio

"Like Jose Rijo or Dave Stewart," enthused one reader, "this writer has command of a number of pitches, knows how to change speeds, and throws strikes." The reflective letter was called "outstanding! It conveys who she is not only in what she says but how she says it." Another reader was impressed by the writer's resourcefulness in incorporating a poem into the letter. "Jane" won plaudits for its interior monologue and for showing rather than telling, and "Motivation" was praised for its "interesting, creative, and original format." Readers described "Transforming Information: Saul Bellow's Africa" as substantial, specific, and well developed. "The argument grows out of the writer's response to the reading, not out of secondary sources," one reader explained.

Portfolio by Chadwick J. Fleck

Rutherford B. Hayes High School
Delaware, Ohio

Author's Introduction

My birth name is Chadwick Jennings Fleck. I never use my full name, though, unless I'm in a suit or applying for something. I hated my name when I was a tot. It took me about two days, three recesses and a nap time to figure out how to write it correctly in order to fulfill my first grade graduation requirements.

Later I came to the conclusion that my name was so insurgent and apart from the norm, that it stood as an attribute, and not a blemish, to my persona. I liked it too. Nonetheless I'm referred to as Chad by family and friends alike. Of course, the extended version is used to place emphasis on getting my attention.

I'd like to dedicate this portfolio to my cousin, Amy Miconi. Someone is watching out for you.

Reflective Letter

Dear Educators,

Until you asked me to "convey a sense of who [I am] as a writer" I had never thought of myself as a "writer." I've written feature articles for my school news magazine, numerous class assignments, and stories just for the fun of it. I've even written poetry for the girls in my life. Whether all these things qualify me as a "writer," I don't know. But I can tell you about myself as a person. In a phrase, I'm a conscientious, hard-working (yet fun-loving) guy. I think that's what my writing is about also. I love to express myself on paper.

"A Time for Tennis Shoes" came to me while brainstorming in

class one day. Then I started webbing out some ideas on paper and discussed some possibilities on angles with my teacher. Before I started pre-writing, I decided I wanted to take a facetious approach to the whole matter for several reasons. One is that it lightened the seriousness of the matter (being the materialism of today's youth), and another is sometimes we see ourselves most clearly when chuckling at others.

I came up with the kids and their attitudes as I began a rough draft. The characters' names hit me just as spontaneously as what they had to say. I worked on the draft, did some copy editing, and had a few friends read it for suggestions. Then I polished up what became my final copy. The article was written for an Advanced Composition class as a column assignment.

My essay on Annie Dillard's Teaching a Stone to Talk comes from a college application in which I was to write a literary analysis of chosen works. Having read Ms. Dillard previously in other forms, it was an interesting assignment.

The "Five Twice" piece was another assignment for my Advanced Composition class. It was fun to let one's imagination have free rein.

To close, I'd like to say how much I appreciate the opportunity to "test out of" some basic English courses. Although I know there is much to learn, I enjoy the work and look forward to moving on to advanced and challenging courses. My love of the written (and spoken) word has led me to choose a college with a liberal arts foundation and I look forward to attending Miami next year—well...in three months. I'll be anxiously awaiting any news.

Five Twice

"Hey Chad, it's time to get up, pal," I heard my dad say as he walked past my bedroom. Well, that's a first, I thought. Normally he'd just flip on my lights and leave me squinting and squealing from the intensity of the three 70 watt bulbs in my ceiling. He said doing this would prepare me for "The Rude Awakening" at college next year.

I rolled out of bed on my knees as Philo the quasi-mutt came in the room to give me a good morning kiss. I slapped him in the head and he appreciatively continued to wash my face. However, when I tried to get to my feet—and out of the range of his tongue—I found that I couldn't stand up. "Uhh," I groaned. "Move, Philo!" I yelled in a surprisingly high voice. Untangling myself from what had to be Aqua-Man bed sheets, I saw what were supposedly my legs. "What the hell!" I shouted as I stretched out these 1-1/2' limbs.

"Chadwick!" my mom yelled as I looked up to see that she was just as shocked as I was. "What happened, Mom?" I screamed in that annoying falsetto voice, "Look at my legs!" Totally oblivious to the situation I was in, she demanded, "What did you just say?"

And that's when I saw it. I mean I saw everything...my Bugs Bunny pajamas, my toys at the foot of the bed, my Marvel Super Heroes wallpaper, my Sit-n-Spin, and the 25 year old complexion of my mom's face. Again, I shouted, "What the hell!"

"I know what you said!" yelled my mom, but as you can see, at

this point we were on completely different wavelengths.

Now instead of trying to tell you how I figured everything out, or letting you try to figure it out on your own, I thought it would be simpler to just explain what happened...exactly.

I don't know how and I don't know why, but somehow I was five again. Literally five years old. I still had the consciousness of the 17-year-old I am, or was? Anyway, if you think I'm handling this well now, I think it is important to let you know that it has been over two months since I woke up five again. Believe me, it has been hell. First I had to come to the realization of what had happened to me and then I had to deal with it. And I thought the stress of college applications and high school romances was unbearable.

I tried for the longest time to justify what had happened. At first I thought it might have been a Back to the Future time warp kind of thing. Or better yet, something like Big, except I got little. I never have, though, nor ever expect to, figure out how or why my consciousness was shot back into 1977. But I'm getting ahead of myself here. I've never told anyone about what has happened to me before, and I'm afraid I don't quite know where to start. Then again I already have, started that is, so now I suppose I'll just get back to the "story."

Week 3:

My parents and my new psychologist (the last one couldn't deal with me) have come to the conclusion that I'm an overnight genius.

In the beginning my folks just figured that I was acting really weird and that I had somehow acquired what my mother calls "The Bad-Mouth." She thinks it's some kind of disease that I contracted from the fifth graders at my elementary school.

After claiming to the locals and the newspapers that I was a child protege, my parents were instructed by numerous friends and neighbors (being the all-knowing members of the science community that they are) to take me into Seattle and see what the other professionals at the McCord & Hill Institute of Intelligence and Psychoanalysis had to say.

Week 5:

Proceeding as instructed, we went to the Institute. There they ran tests, asked stupid questions, researched my family genealogy, asked stupid questions, made me take tests, and asked some more really swell questions. After four days of this, the Institute came to the conclusion that they didn't know anything.

"We can't really say what has happened to your son at this point in the game," said Dr. Rasenbladder. I just called him Dr. Gumby because he walked exactly like Gumby. And after hearing me refer to him in this manner, my parents began calling him Dr. Gumby too, for simplicity's sake of course. "But, we'll keep right on doing this research bit until your house is on its third mortgage!" he continued with a smile. Just kidding.

Dr. Gumby went on to say, "Chad has the intelligence and the maturity level of a high school graduate, but he is not a genius in the conventional sense of the word. I mean he's not composing

symphonies or speaking five languages or anything, is he!" he said as he roared with laughter. Hey Fritz, I've had three years of German, I remember thinking.

He went on, "Your child has somehow allowed his ability to remain dormant blah, blah, blaaahhh..." He continued in some language that even my parents, who were paying attention, could not understand. I, meanwhile, had noticed this incredible looking nurse/doctor out in the hallway. She had on this tight thigh length skirt that showed off some of the tonest, most breath-taking legs I had seen since... Anyway, when she noticed this five year old kid drooling over her exposed flesh, she got the most unnerved look on her face that I have ever seen.

Week 8:

BEEP...BEEP...BEEP...BEEP...It must have been forever before my uncooperative consciousness registered that I actually needed to turn off the alarm clock to get it to quit and not just think about turning it off. I rolled out of bed in the dark wondering why on earth I was up this early. I walked into the bathroom to relieve myself because it seemed the appropriate thing to do at this hour. I flipped on the blinding lights and did my business in what I hoped was the general direction of the toilet. Hearing the splash below me, I congratulated myself for having such miraculous intuition.

Then as I turned to leave, with one eye partially open, I saw my 5'8" frame in the mirror. In a moment I knew I was back. For some reason though I wasn't shocked, nor even relieved to be

seventeen again. Maybe I was expecting it to happen all along. Maybe I was too tired to care.

Wandering back to my room, I pondered what to do next. The little red lights on the alarm clock said it was Thursday. I suppose that means I go to school.

All of a sudden I saw a bedroom that wasn't mine. This, to put it bluntly, slapped me out of my lackadaisical state. This is our house though, I remember thinking, or at least the toilet was in the same place. The room was well decorated and decked out with an impressive stereo system and Bose speakers of course. There were paintings on the wall along with an abstract photo or two and a bachelor's degree certificate with my name on it.

"What the hell!" I screamed. (I suppose you're thinking deja vu, right? Well boy, you're pretty quick!). "What's wrong, pal?" my dad said as he came out of his room. He looked over my shoulder and into my room to try to find out what all the shouting was about. Noticing the clock, Dad said, "You better get your butt in the shower before your sister gets up if you want to get in to register for your Master's thesis class at all today!"

I stared at him with an expression that said "huh?" I thought, What sister? What thesis cla... Then that superb intuition of mine told me that I didn't really want to know.

A Time for Tennis Shoes

A wise Jefferson Elementary school graduate once said, "Success may be measured by the logo on your tennis shoes." This statement is not only profound, but true. Recent surveys show that 90% of all people between the ages of nine and thirteen believe that the proper athletic footwear now will have a critical effect on their future. It would seem therefore that parents should listen to their kid's plea for the $128 sneakers, if they really want what is best for their child.

Mike Jock, 11, has parents that can sympathize with his situation. "My Mom and Dad know I gotta have some new Adidas or Nikes every three or four months. And then I hafta get some new shoes for basketball and tennis too. It's really important to my game to stay on the cutting edge of the tennis shoe industry. I once had an old pair of Air Jordans in a basketball game and I only scored six points. That's when my Dad said, 'That's enough of that,' and now I get new ones quarterly. My friend Gary's dad has this cool pair of...."

Not only do the shoes affect these kids' athletic ability but also their intellect. There are shoes on the market that grade school and Jr. High students' academic achievements can be tied to.

S. A. Teeman, 13, can vouch for that. "I myself have been wearing Tretorns for the past five years. Not only have they given me academic traction, they have also given me sole," he laughs. "Some other smart brands out there are Saucony and

Ellesse. They can really change a person's life outside and in. But I think the most important thing your shoes may affect is college acceptance. The good schools don't just want Joe Zipps anymore. They want footwear on their students that they can be proud of, that will build the school's reputation, and will carry their scholars on to prestigious and alumni-funding lives. So if you're wearing queer shoes now, don't worry. There is still time to save yourself. They don't put it on your record until high school. But if you're still wearing 'em then, kiss Cool College good-bye!"

Finally, we discuss the area of perhaps most importance for these young impressionable kids—their social lives. Brand names have been directly connected to several cliques found in every school.

Susan P. Rep, 12, believes that tennis shoes are the perfect medium to designate a person's social standing. "Shoes are like the coolest thing cause they say so much about what you're like and everything. My boyfriend, Bobby, has the newest line of Diadora shoes. No, seriously! He has all the styles they came out with for the whole year. I can tell what kind of mood he's in just by which pair he's wearing. And I got these really cool pair of Reeboks yesterday. They were really me, ya know. They were only $94 on sale. Can you believe it? But anyway, your shoes can make you popular, or they can bring you down. That's just the way it is. I mean, there is like no other way to judge who's cool to be with and who's not!"

As you can clearly see, tennis shoes aren't just tennis shoes

anymore. The world is a scary, changing place. If you don't overcome, adapt, succeed, make lots of money, own a condo in Maui, or have your obituary printed in Newsweek, then you really won't (or didn't) amount to anything. Hopefully though, with the right pair of tennis shoes at an early age, you can make the world your stomping ground.

Teaching a Stone to Talk

In Illusions, Richard Bach states, "Here is a test to find whether your mission on earth is finished: If you're alive, it isn't." Perhaps Bach and Annie Dillard are chiseling the same sculpture from opposite ends of the philosophical boulder. For if humanity's mission is "to call God back to the mountain" as Dillard phrases it, then no doubt both would agree the mission is not finished.

Endless unanswerable questions go through one's mind as one matures psychologically and spiritually. Questions such as "If God can do anything, can He make a rock He can't lift?" and "If God has been forever, what was before that?" Eventually, one begins pondering life's greatest mystery: "Why am I here? What is my mission, God?" I've heard theories justifying our existence from preachers, poets, and my peers. However, Dillard's philosophy is one of the most profound and is worthy of our

efforts to interpret it. Other writers stress personal achievement or enlightenment while Ms. Dillard suggests we strive for something not of this earth: an unfathomable idea...actually communicating with God.

However, I believe Dillard and myself have different opinions as to what God might have to say. She seems to think that homo sapiens are God's only concern and that everything else in existence is expendable. "We are here to witness. There is nothing else to do with those mute materials we do not need," states Dillard. It is my belief that it is very selfish to think that simply because something is not helpful or beneficial, it has no purpose for being.

Dillard states, "We do not use songbirds, for instance. We do not eat many of them; we cannot befriend them; we cannot persuade them to eat more mosquitoes or plant fewer weed seeds. We can only witness them—whoever they are. If we were not here, they would be songbirds falling in the forest. If we were not here, material events like the passage of seasons would lack even the meager meanings we are able to muster for them. The show would play to an empty house, as do all those falling stars which fall in the daytime." Again, it is somewhat arrogant to say that if that which exists is of no use to us, then it exists solely to be witnessed by us; therefore, only as valuable as the importance humans place on it. If this is true, how valuable are we to the rocks and the stars and the seasons? Might they find us equally unimportant as Ms. Dillard finds them? In thousands of years, after we have perhaps become extinct, the seasons and the stars

could conceivably still exist, regardless of our acknowledgment of their presence.

Perhaps I am taking Ms. Dillard's remarks too literally. Perhaps my inexperience limits the complexity of my interpretation of her essay, but this inexperience does not nullify my point of view. Although she enumerates many examples of humanity's egotistical attitude, in her introduction Ms. Dillard states that she respects her neighbor's attempt to teach a stone to talk, implying she believes the stone may have something valuable to say. It may not be with arrogance but with thought-provoking, tongue-in-cheek delivery that she states her case. I believe "Yes" is the answer to the age-old adage, "If a tree falls in a forest and no one is there to hear it, will it still make a sound?" And I believe God (and perhaps Ms. Dillard) would agree.

Readers' Comments on Chadwick J. Fleck's Portfolio

"Each piece is distinctive and successful," one reader said. The reflective letter appealed to readers especially for the humor and sense of discovery in its opening paragraph. "Five Twice" was described by one reader as "imaginative, inventive, and funny." Another said "It's hard to end humorous essays well, but this writer does it." "A Time for Tennis Shoes" was called "a fresh and pointed satire" which extends and deepens the humor of the first two pieces. By contrast, "Teaching a Stone" impressed the readers as a serious and thoughtful essay, in part because it raises important philosophical questions. One reader spoke for the rest when she said, "This writer clearly knows what he's doing."

Portfolio by Leslie Kennel

Edgewood High School
Trenton, Ohio

Author's Introduction

Hi! My name is Leslie Kennel. I'm from Middletown, Ohio. I graduated from Edgewood High School, home of the Cougars, in Trenton, Ohio. I'm a secondary education major at Miami, seeking certification in mathematics, basic business, and bookkeeping. I'm having a great time in college enjoying lots of new experiences.

I come from a very close family and have lived in the country my whole life. My interests include bicycling, gymnastics, and animals. I've raised sheep for ten years through my county 4-H program. I'm an outgoing person and I love to get involved.

I hope to begin teaching the fall after graduation. I plan to pursue a master's degree and eventually become a high school guidance counselor or administrator.

Reflective Letter

Dear Miami University English Teachers,

Hello, fellow writers. I am a senior in an advanced writing class at my high school. Although I write mostly from personal experience, I've written a variety of pieces over the past few years, experimenting with various techniques and genres and refining my style. Today, I'd like to share with you the process through which I created my favorite pieces.

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Okay. Childhood remembrance. Where do I start? First, it has to be about the bus. When I think of my childhood, I think of the bus. It's only logical, right? I've spent half my life riding the bus.

Mrs. Robinson, the central figure of my younger years. There are two million stories I could write about the bus. Let's see...

The time we...

1. broke the heater
2. slid down the hill on Howe Road into the ditch because of the snowstorm
3. plowed into a semi
4. told Heather she was bitten by a killer mosquito
5. watched Big Tina beat the tar out of Wendy Whitt
6. put 500 staples in Big Tina's hair

Yes! That's it. It has to be about Big Tina. She's funny. I want my story to be funny. Everybody likes a funny story.

So, what do I need? I need to include lots of details about

Mrs. Robinson—fat, dumpy, mean, screechy voice. More details about the bus in general—assigned seats, boys' side, girls' side, big kids, little kids, mean kids, snot-nosed kids, tattle tales...

I have to make sure I mention Mrs. Robinson's paddle. And the way she always started off with a grind of the gears.

Wait, I should probably start at the beginning of my story so my listeners get a clear picture of what's going on. A good description of my surroundings—crowded seats, aisles full of school bags, flying paper and insults...I'll start with some dialogue to catch their attention.

I think

I'll leave them hanging at the end.

There's really no way
to resolve the story
except to tell
what happened
Boooorrrriiiinnnng
Boring the listener is not good;
I'll definitely leave them hanging

Okay, that should do it for planning. Now, let's get to it. Start with dialogue:

"That's it! I've had it!" a voice screeched from the front of the bus. We lurched to a stop.

Good start. Two strong verbs already. Now the description.

She wore a large brown T-shirt borrowed from someone much smaller than herself. She had drab polyester bell bottoms to match.

Excellent showing details.

RULE #3 Put the reader there.

This is a good time for the paddle, when she's good and mad.

.....waving the paddle threateningly above our heads.

Can't you just see her? Now for some conflict. It's time to bring in Big Tina. The queen of conflict herself.

"I'm not moving." Big Tina's scowling face cast a shadow over the entire bus.

Wait a minute. That leaves Mrs. Robinson defeated. I can't do that. She never lost. Add in:

"We'll see about that!"

There. A vague victory is better than none at all.

This story is starting to drag a little. No problem. Just insert a few asterisks to show the passage of time.

* * * * * *

(it is now this afternoon)

"Tara, you go back and sit with Cheri in the back seat."

Now I'm stuck. How do I get to the meat of my story? I need Big Tina back in. A grand entrance should do the trick.

The brakes whined and the door crashed open. There was a large thud at the front of the bus. Big Tina. Late again. Probably on purpose.

Effective use of fragments. Now I need a description.

RULE #6 Let the reader experience it as you did.

She slouched back to her new assigned seat, her large chest smothering faces on both sides of her path.

I hope they laugh at that. I thought it was funny. They'll never know it's embellished. And she really did have a big chest.

Okay, now it's time for the meat of my story.

MOVING IN FOR THE KILL

"Help me hold it still," she said, now pointing at the mane before us.

"Oh, my gosh!" My eyes widened and I felt my stomach churn in response to the risk at hand.

I offered a shaky hand to steady the swinging of Big Tina's tail.

Here goes. This is **IT**. The moment you've all been waiting for. Ladies and gentlemen, I now present to you the climax of my story!

We exchanged an evil smirk and began to staple. We stapled and stapled. We didn't stop stapling until we had emptied the stapler and the box of reserves.

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Well, that's it. I hope you enjoyed sharing my thoughts and ideas. Thank you for your time and consideration.

It Just Goes to Show that You Never Can Tell
What You Might Find in the Bottom of a
Schoolbox with Teddy Bears on It

"All right, I've had it!" a voice screeched from the front of the bus. We lurched to a stop.

Mrs. Robinson threw us into park before the bus was at a standstill. She heaved her buxom figure from the driver's seat to face us. Fifty-two pairs of eyes were glued to her face. She reached a large arm out to the side, opening the glove compartment to retrieve the ammunition she needed to back up her threat.

She straightened up, and I could see her more clearly. Her angry face was mean. Her mouth twisted into an intimidating glare. She had Clairol jet black hair. She wore a large brown T-shirt borrowed from someone much smaller than herself. She had drab polyester bell bottoms to match. Cargo ship sized tennis shoes peeked out from under them.

Mrs. Robinson was a large woman. Her body filled all the space between the driver's seat and the steps. One flabby arm dangled at her side. The other was raised threateningly above our heads waving the paddle.

The paddle was as long as a good-sized large mouth bass and as wide as one cheek of a fourth grade butt. Just perfect for whacking a young delinquent into good behavior.

"If you kids don't settle down back there, I'm gonna tan your

cans!" Her beady eyes let us know she was not kidding. "One more word and you won't be riding this bus another day. Your parents will just have to take care of getting you to school."

There was a snicker from somewhere behind me. Then another. And another, until the whole big kids section of the bus roared with laughter.

Now losing control, Mrs. Robinson had to do something quick, so she pulled out the big guns.

"You big kids will move to the front and the little ones will get the back seat."

Silence.

The back seat? No one but eighth graders ever got the back seat. Was she crazy? This was worse than the paddle. This was like fifty paddles all at once.

"This afternoon when you get on the bus there will be new assigned seats."

A shock wave spread from the eighth graders in the back to the kindergartners in the front.

A loud bellow interrupted my dreams of the back seat. I slid down in my seat when I recognized the voice. It was Big Tina. Big Tina was mad. And when Big Tina got mad, there was trouble for sure.

"I'm not moving."

I peeked over my shoulder to see Big Tina's scowling face casting a shadow over the entire bus.

"We'll see about that," Mrs. Robinson huffed, her face reddening with every word.

"Well, I'm not." Big Tina was not going to be persuaded.

"Maybe you'd like to tell that to Mr. Kash this morning."

"I don't care," she said, shrugging her shoulders as if it was of no importance to her one way or the other." She plopped down in her seat, arms crossed. Her painted lips formed a well-practiced pout.

Mrs. Robinson shot a disgusted look her way before putting the paddle away for safekeeping. She turned with one last menacing glare before lumbering back to her seat. One grind of the gears and we were on our way. Things were back to normal. We forgot about getting our cans tanned.

* * * * * * * *

"Tara, you go back and sit with Cheri in the back seat."

A delighted grin lit my face. I hurried back down the aisle, banging against every leg and protruding foot, cuffing more than a few ears with my heavy schoolbag.

"Hi, Tara! How was the fourth grade?" Cheri teased. Cheri was a fifth grader this year, and she got to ride the bus all the way to the Middle School

"Hi, Cheri! Can you believe it? We get to sit in the back seat."

I greeted Alan and Carl on my right. They were squirming in their seats at this new development in our careers as professional busriders. I shouted hello to Scarlet and Sonia four seats up. They were fuming because they'd only been promoted one seat closer

to the back. The seats were buzzing. She'd really done it. She'd assigned new seats. She hadn't put the big kids in the back seat.

The brakes whined, and the door crashed open. There was a large thud at the front of the bus. A head of extremely frizzy hair shuffled up the steps. Big Tina. Late again. Probably on purpose.

She slouched back to her new assigned seat, her large chest smothering faces on both sides of her path. As she got nearer, I could smell her cheap perfume. It was a sweet, dark smell, something my mother would gasp at in the department store. Her jeans stretched tightly across her thirteen-year-old body, pulling at the seams, shifting with her walk. Scowling again, she presented an unpleasant picture. Large pimples covered her face. There was even one on her nose. Big Tina's new seat was the one directly in front of ours.

She plopped down beside Wendy, squashing her against the window. Big Tina sat very still, staring straight ahead. Her bushy hair hung back into our seat. I shrank away, not wanting to be touched by it.

We stumbled into gear and once again, the bus was buzzing.

I turned to ask Cheri what she thought of our new seating arrangement, but she was busy digging in her schoolbag. She yanked out her cardboard schoolbox with the teddy bears on it. Her blond curls bounced excitedly. She opened the lid so eagerly that she almost ripped it off.

"Look what I got," she whispered, whipping out a miniature red

stapler the size of my big toe.

"What's that for?"

"I don't know. What do you think we should use it for?"

I shrugged, brushing a strand of Big Tina's mop from my knee onto Cheri's.

"I know," she said.

"What?"

Putting one finger to her lips, she winked and grinned.

"Help me hold it still," she said, now pointing to the mane before us.

"Oh my gosh!" My eyes widened and I felt my stomach churn in response to the risk at hand.

I offered a shaky hand to steady the swinging of Big Tina's tail.

We exchanged an evil smirk and began to giggle. We stapled and stapled. We didn't stop stapling until we had emptied the stapler and the box of reserves.

A Disobedient King

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s philosophy and ideals, developed a century after Henry David Thoreau's time, bear a remarkable resemblance to the principles set forth in Thoreau's essay, "Civil Disobedience."

Thoreau set a definite tone for his readers in the introduction of his essay, stating "This American government,—what is it but a tradition, though a recent one, endeavoring to transmit itself unimpaired to posterity, but each instant losing some of its integrity?" Martin Luther King, Jr. added, "One hundred years after the end of slavery, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. I have a dream that one day every crooked place will be made straight." His "I Have A Dream" speech, given in Washington, D.C., served as a magnet for thousands who desperately wanted to hear his message. Both men saw a need for a fair and honest government. Thoreau realized that not everything could be exactly as he would've liked it to be, but he pressed hard for changes, saying, "But to speak practically and as a citizen, unlike those who call themselves no-government men, I ask you, not at once for no government, but <u>at once</u> for a better government." In saying this, he demands that the government make an immediate attempt to reform itself to better serve the people.

King believed in action for the support of goals. He argued that words were not enough. "If tokenism were our goal, this administration has swiftly moved us toward its accomplishment. But tokenism can now be seen not only as a useless goal, but as a genuine menace." His plans, as the leader of the civil rights movement, were to peacefully change the minds of Americans and stimulate them into helping achieve equality for blacks.

Thoreau recognized the futility of the word of the American people when it was not backed by a true belief. He said, "The

character of voters is not staked. I cast my vote, perchance, as I think right, but I am not vitally concerned that right should prevail. Even voting for the right is doing nothing for it." Thoreau went to jail for not paying his taxes. He not only voted against the tax hike, but took action against it. In an article he wrote for Nation, King hoped that the American public would soon realize that it was at "a historic crossroad" and at stake was "its moral commitment." Throughout "Civil Disobedience," Thoreau pleads with Americans to realize that it is their responsibility to take action.

Thoreau further asserted that "There is but little virtue in the action of masses of men." He realized that a murmur of discontent in a crowd would be brushed aside, but a loud cry from an indignant leader of a group of people would be recognized. King's experiences as a leader support this claim. His campaign began as a small-town stand against an unfair rule concerning the use of public transit in Montgomery, Alabama. His reaction to the injustice of the situation in Montgomery took Thoreau up on his challenge, "Unjust laws exist: Shall we be content to obey them or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once?"

King came to the aid of a gutsy woman named Rosa Parks after she was taken to jail for not sitting in the black section of the city bus. Mrs. Parks was refined and well-mannered enough—she just refused to change seats because she was "tired." The humiliation and harassment she endured as a result of her defiance were enough to make her quit her job and help local blacks

organize a campaign of protest against the law. King headed the black community's boycott of Montgomery buses. Blacks comprised more than 75% of all riders, and the loss of their fares caused immediate financial problems for the Montgomery City Line. The boycotters answered Thoreau's question, "Must the citizen ever for a moment or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator?" with a resounding "no." Their answer agreed wholeheartedly with Thoreau's own answer, "I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward."

Thoreau rebelled against the government he felt was unfair in a quiet way. He simply "cannot for an instant recognize that political organization as my government which is the slave's government also." In "boycotting" the government, Thoreau was doing more than just complaining about it. He was refusing to acknowledge that it even existed. King did not disown the government altogether but readily recognized its faults and worked for change for the better. He led many marches in many cities, working against the injustice and wrongdoings of his government. He never wavered from what he told his followers during that first protest. "We will not resort to violence. We will not degrade ourselves with hatred. Love will be returned for hate." In a way, he carried out Thoreau's plan that one should "let his life be a counter friction to stop the machine of government if it should not first wear itself out because of the injustice therein."

I think the slight difference of attitude between Thoreau and King is due to the differences in their environments, the problems

facing them, and the means available to solve them. Thoreau seemed to take an inflexible attitude, asserting that "the authority of government, even such as I am willing to submit to, is still an impure one: to be strictly just, it must have the sanction and consent of the governed." He stuck to his ideals even when he was punished for it. He delivered a slap in the face to his government by using his stay in jail to become a better writer against the system. King agreed, but realized that changes take time and compromise. He was an eloquent man, charming Vice President Nixon with the words, "We [the black South] have an unshakable spirit and we believe very strongly that the South cannot solve its problems without positive federal action." He used subtle pressure to get what he knew was necessary to make a dent in the brick wall of the mind of the white American.

I think Thoreau would have agreed that King did have an unshakable spirit. One of Thoreau's favorite ideals was a free mind. He told us that "if a man is thought-free, fancy-free, imagination-free, that which <u>is not</u> never for a long time appearing to be him, unwise rulers or reformers cannot fatally interrupt him." Thoreau is a genuine example of this during his stay in prison. He doesn't feel locked up at all, but states that he "could not help being struck with the foolishness of that institution which treated me as if I were mere flesh and blood and bones." This seems to be an accurate description of King as well. The fact that there was segregation and discrimination tells us that King did not agree with everyone. Many times he developed his own thoughts and new ideas, different from anything ever done

before. Surely he truly was thought-free and fancy-free.

In one of his many speeches, King pledged his allegiance to the fight for Black freedom, proclaiming, "We are on the move now and no amount of church burnings will stop us. Ours is an irrepressible movement that neither beating and killing of clergymen, nor maiming of young people could possibly divert." He faced tragedy, death, poverty, and the bombing of his own home during his leadership of American blacks. Certainly, Thoreau would have commended him for his courage. "O for a man who is a man, as my neighbor says, has a bone in his back which you cannot pass your hand through."

It almost seems as if Thoreau could see forward in time into Martin Luther King Jr.'s life. His statement, "After the first blush of sin comes its indifference; and from immoral it becomes, as it were, unmoral, and not quite unnecessary to that life which we have made" could be describing King's feeling of frustration when people closed their ears to his words. Thoreau faced many trials himself, including the loss of his "friends," because he chose to "break a law rather than be an coward and obey one that is wrong."

Thoreau said, "The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right." He thought that it was okay for everyone to go their own way, but he went his own, too. He never cited an instance in which he pushed his beliefs on someone else. King's principles differed here. He pushed for the acceptance of blacks by all people. "We deserve equality and we demand respect." Leaving well enough alone was not enough for

King.

In "Civil Disobedience," Thoreau showed strong emotion about the role of great men in our society. "A very few, as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense, and men, serve the State with their consciences also, and necessarily resist it for the most part; and they are commonly treated as enemies by it." I believe that he was a great man himself, a sincere reformer. If his words had been spoken 100 years later, they could have been a description of Martin Luther King, Jr. and his efforts.

King spent time in jail as a result of his work. During his stay in Birmingham, Alabama, he wrote a moving letter, promising his faithful followers that "one day the South will know that when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters they were in reality standing up for what is best in the American dream and for the most sacred values in our Judeo-Christian heritage." Thoreau's words on prison reassure us that King's stays there were not a disgrace and a stumbling block but a blessing in disguise. "If any think that their influence should be lost there, and their voices no longer afflict the ears of the State, that they would not be as an enemy within its walls, they do not know by how much truth is stronger than error, nor how much more eloquently and effectively he can combat injustice who experienced a little in his own person." Thoreau once again called upon his own experience as an inmate to offer words of encouragement to the downtrodden and walked on men in society.

It is evident, after carefully examining the lives of both

Henry David Thoreau and Martin Luther King, Jr., that they are alike in numerous ways. Their philosophies, beliefs, and principles could almost be superimposed.

Let us never forget there is a reason for everything. The assassination of a great leader like Martin Luther King, Jr. is not soon forgotten. Today, we honor his birth with a national holiday. His work and devotion are both unprecedented and unequaled.

When King died, his funeral service was attended by the Vice-President of the United States, the chief contenders for the presidential nomination, 50 members of the House of Representatives, 30 senators, a regiment of mayors, a platoon of foreign dignitaries, a legion of private citizens, and thousands of blacks still hoping for their dream to come true.

It's true that there is no national holiday to remember the death of Thoreau, but no one quite understood death at the time that King was killed as well as Thoreau did a century earlier, simply stating, "If a plant cannot live according to its nature, it dies; and so a man."

Words Will Never Harm Me

Human nature is complex. Many of our actions are difficult to comprehend and even harder to explain. In Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery," she shows us a side of ourselves that we sometimes

prefer not to acknowledge.

In "The Lottery," the residents of a small village stone a woman to death. Their victim is a wife and mother of four children. She is also a friend to many of the villagers. On the day of the lottery, everyone gathers in the center of town. Tessie Hutchinson arrives late, apologizing, "'Clean forgot what day it was. Then I remembered it was the twenty-seventh and came a-running.'"

While the townspeople are waiting for the lottery to begin, everyone stands around talking. The women are gossiping, and the men are discussing planting and rain, tractors and taxes. Mrs. Delacroix greets Tessie with a smile when she finally arrives, saying, "'You're in time, though. They're still talking away up there.'" As Tessie makes her way through the crowd to her husband "people separate good-humoredly to let her through."

At the beginning, Jackson paints a picture of a small rural village where the people are a close-knit community. However, as the story progresses, we discover that the townspeople are not what they seem to be at first glance. Under the surface, they are self-centered, looking out for themselves before considering anyone else. When Bill Hutchinson draws the unlucky paper, Tessie shouts, "'You didn't give him time enough to take any paper he wanted. I saw you. It wasn't fair.'"

As much as we would like to think that family and friends are always loyal and would never desert us, things do not always work out that way. Sometimes love can blind us to the negative aspects of the behaviors and personalities of the people we love. On the

other hand, at times, concern for our own well-being can overshadow the responsibility we feel for our loved ones' happiness.

The rest of the people have no sympathy for the Hutchinson family. For example, in "The Lottery," Mrs. Delacroix is very friendly towards Tessie Hutchinson until she draws the deadly slip of paper. She feels no remorse that her friend is going to be murdered, only relief that it is not her. Only moments before, she had laughed with Tessie about forgetting what day it was. Now she answered her friend's protests with, "'Be a good sport, Tessie.'" Mrs. Graves adds, "'All of us took the same chance.'"

Tessie herself deserts her family in a moment of wild fear. Once it has been established that the victim will be a member of the Hutchinson family, she gets hysterical. She asserts, "'It wasn't fair,'" and tries to persuade the official to include her married daughters in the drawing.

In spite of the ties of friendship and family, people are often selfish. Jackson shows us that Tessie will do anything to escape being the victim of the lottery. Mrs. Hutchinson's concern for her family disappears and is replaced by terror for herself. Even though the lottery was done fairly, Tessie loses sight of this fact as she pictures herself dying at the hands of her fellow villagers and her own family. Beneath the veneer of civilization, people frequently remain savage. After Tessie draws the fateful paper with the black spot on it, the villagers begin to gather stones to pelt her with. Mrs. Delacroix "selected a stone so large she had to pick it up with both hands." As the people

gathered their stones, "someone gave little Davy Hutchinson a few pebbles."

Stoning is an outdated form of punishment. Although Jackson does not tell us what time period the story takes place in, we can assume that the world is fairly advanced from the clues she gives us. The men talk about farming and taxes, and the women complain about doing dishes. The town has a post office, a coal company, a general store, and a school.

Jackson establishes the fact that the lottery is an age-old tradition when she tells us that "the original paraphernalia for the lottery had been lost long ago." Although the black box was in disrepair, the townspeople refused to make a new box. "The black box grew shabbier each year. It was no longer completely black but splintered badly along one side to show the original wood. No one liked to upset even as much tradition as was represented by the black box."

People may foolishly seek scapegoats to atone for their sins. The villagers feel that by choosing a victim "fairly" from among themselves, they are not doing anything wrong. Under the guise of a long-practiced tradition, the lottery presents itself as a justifiable event. The people have convinced themselves that when they persecute the unlucky winner of the lottery, they are erasing all of their sins. Tessie Hutchinson serves as the savior for the villagers' souls. The community believes that they are purifying themselves by executing her. This leads us to the conclusion that Tessie's friends and family are committing the ultimate sin of killing to repent for all of their little sins in everyday life.

Jackson uses this example to show us that in an effort to cleanse their consciences, the villagers are multiplying their mistakes.

The strong tradition of the lottery is deeply ingrained in the people. Old Man Warner is appalled when someone mentions that other towns have quit the lottery. "'Pack of crazy fools. Listening to the young folks, nothing's good enough for them,' he states emphatically, adding, 'Used to be a saying about "Lottery in June, corn'll be heavy soon."'" The lottery is performed almost as a celebration or festival. On the day it is to be done, there is "a lot of fussing to be done."

Using these examples, Jackson shows us that people often cling blindly to foolish, outworn, destructive traditions. The blind faith of the people in the power of the lottery is best illustrated in an example with Old Man Warner. At the gathering, he proudly claims, "'Seventy-seventh year I been in the lottery. Seventy-seventh year.'" When Mr. Adams suggests that perhaps it's time to get rid of the lottery, Warner replies indignantly, "'Next thing you know, they'll be wanting to go back to living in caves, nobody work any more, live that way for awhile.'"

Readers' Comments on Leslie Kennel's Portfolio

The reflective letter immediately won over its readers: one called it "wonderful," a second "memorable," and a third "charming." But readers found "It Just Goes to Show..." to be equally effective: one said "the narrative shines in its use of dialogue"; a second commented that "the description is great"; and a third added that "the understatement reminds me of Raymond Carver and the ending is worthy of Flannery O'Connor." The comparison of Martin Luther King and Henry David Thoreau, "A Disobedient King," struck readers as a thoughtful essay that dealt in significant ways with vital issues. One reader, recognizing a link between these first three items and "Words Will Never Harm Me," remarked that "a connection between pieces of writing—even across genres—seems to characterize the best portfolios."

Portfolio by Leah Rader

Arcanum High School
Arcanum, Ohio

Author's Introduction

When sages encourage youth to "try new things!" I used to think of hang gliding into ravines, scaling bald mountains or other activities with high death potential. Those are meaningful experiences which spark deep and creative thought, so I imagined. Now I see that smaller, seemingly commonplace experiences have jump started my brain a lot quicker and more often. Recently, a jaw infection caused my right cheek to swell amazingly and I looked like a creature out of "The Far Side." Passersby stared at me oddly, as if they felt guilty for noticing my deformity but were impelled to stare because they couldn't decide if I was born that way or had a mutant disease. It was very humbling but also educational because suddenly I really understood the feelings of people without eyebrows or those with strange scars shaped like the Great Lakes on their foreheads. I could identify with something new and situations like that have often prompted my writing. "Try new things!"

Reflective Letter

Dear Committee Members,

A dream I have tucked away in the "all men created equal" section of my brain shows me as a passenger in a '79 Chevy with its male chauvinist owner. When his brakes squeal wildly every time he taps the brake pedal, I casually mention, "Sounds like you need to get your rotors flipped!" His discriminating mouth drops open at this sublime insight, and his image of me is elevated to the rank of an Eternal Knowledge Holder. I dream this dream when my own brakes whine, but as soon as I finish reading the mental script, my brain flashes ahead to another scenario, and I watch

the action unfold in brief, illuminating snatches of plot. It's hard to control my daydreams, and I enjoy even less control when I write. Sometimes I'm able to negotiate semantics under the table, but usually I have to wait until the story is nearly completed before I know what it's about.

In contrast, I had one English teacher, Mr. DeBrosse, who believed in the traditional writing process with all his being and demanded pre-writing and revisions. I think that he helps his students work hard at creating good pieces of writing. I also think he would be very disappointed to find out that I had to bulk up my pre-writing and supplement my revisions for his assignments to give the appearance of several drafts. Our approaches to the finished product are opposite. We both enjoy good writing, but he delights in preparing character bio sheets and pre-lists while I prefer to apply pen to paper and wait. Something eventually works its way from my vault of observations and imaginings onto the paper in a way that excites me. I'm rarely at a loss for words, and I crave the spontaneity of that approach.

A twinge of worry gnaws at me as I admit to college English professors that I use such an unstructured writing style, but this is a method that works for me. I constantly wonder about curious things, read a lot of books, embellish the truth in my mind, and maintain an open attitude. Sometimes I think these characteristics influence my writing more than the writing process ever has.

"Grandma's Closet" represents my writing style well because it had little premeditated thought. It was my product for a Darke

County English test that was set up to measure the holistic writing abilities and comprehension of all Darke County sophomore students. The test provided two hours for the students to write on the pre-selected topic, "My Favorite Place..." Immediately I thought, what can I write about that would be really interesting? My goal wasn't to answer the question but rather to entertain my audience. The "answer" could be dealt with at any time or never. Once I remembered how I feel when I enter my Grandma's house, the story was instantly finished. I'm not sure how this process happens, but it is like having a cinematographer project a movie on a screen on the inside of my forehead. All I have to do is report on what happens in the movie.

When I looked at "Grandma's Closet" recently, I went through the original draft to change vague areas and strengthen others. I feel this revision is an improvement of my spontaneous first effort yet still retains its original excitement. The majority of my recent writing efforts have focused on poetry and play scripts, so I selected for this portfolio some materials from past classes.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my portfolio for assessment.

Grandma's Closet

Kissing hello and hugging over armloads of luggage, I straggle into Grandma's one-story stucco house. The familiar rag rugs lap

up the slush and raindrops dripping from my muddied boots and streaming hair, while the fragrant apple butter simmers on the range. I throw down my wraps onto the heavy oak table and rush through the archway into the sitting room. Relief warms me when I find that nothing in here is different—though I know nothing in Grandma's house can change. Smiling, I whisk my finger along the mother-of-pearl telephone handle as I skip into my bedroom in the back of the house.

In here, the air is dark and calm; I feel as though I must stop reverently to catch my breath. The dark maple dressing table nudges into my side as I tiptoe by the stern footboard of the double bed. I drop my bags at the side of a cabinet and reach up for the string shoelace that belongs to the lamp above the dresser. As soon as I feel the click and pull of the light's entrails, the room is washed in yellow light that soaks into the pale, high walls.

The hairline cracks weaving among the ceiling like the gray hairs on my grandmother's head speak the age of the walls. I can envision the Civil War blazing beyond the yellow curtains at the window as fugitive soldiers search for a place to hide. A place to hide! How could I have forgotten so easily? For five hours in the cramped car I anticipated the door—and beyond.

Dropping to my knees, I crawl into the closet and wade through Grandma's old gardening boots and bump my head on the back wall. Dazed and surprised, I trace the line where floorboards meet plaster until I find the tiny lever that is covered with dust. I steadily press against the spring until it snaps back, and the

door shifts open just far enough for me to dig my fingers into the gap. Pushing at the rusty hinges, my muscles strain as I shove back the small rectangular door.

Crouching low, I crabwalk through the narrow opening until the cool stone slab farther in chills my outstretched palms. Slowly stretching, I stand up in the inky blackness feeling disoriented and lost. Unable to resist, I raise my hand to my eyes for my own quirky darkness test—sure enough, I am blind to the wriggling fingers. After catching my breath, I cautiously slide onto the chipped and mottled steps that descend around the dark curve ahead. With my hand on the naked plaster wall for security, I creep down into the innards of Grandma's house.

Pushing open the stout oak-slab door, I can almost see the faint outlines of furniture inside the secret room at the end of the limestone steps. My hand shakes as I feel for a match and candle to illuminate the room. The time I spend away from this little cavern seems stretched and enormous even though it's been only six months since I've been here with the objects most precious to me.

Every memory and detail comes rushing to me as I remember my chair with the peeling varnish and my marble-topped table with the broken drawer. Over against the far wall are my faded books with broken bindings on the unpainted decrepit bookshelf and my secret letters hidden in the cracked vase that I sculpted at summer Bible camp.

I crank up the wheezy victrola, plop on a warped record of "Yankee Doodle Dandy" and do a victory dance on my saggy,

degenerate bed. I dance for all the Union Soldiers who hid down in this forgotten cubbyhole and for the quiet peace I always find patiently waiting for me when I visit Grandma. I dance long and hard in remembrance.

The Last Supper Comes in First

The depiction of Jesus with his twelve apostles on the eve of his crucifixion has been painted by many different Renaissance artists with the same title, Last Supper. However, out of all of the Renaissance masters, only two versions were painted—and the gap between the two styles was more like a chasm. Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper was so radically different and innovative that it alone survived the centuries of changing artistic taste to still be popular. The other interpretations were condemned to boring art history textbooks. Da Vinci ignored the accepted "rules" of painting, and that very break away from tradition has made his version of the Last Supper superior to all others.

One of Leonardo da Vinci's contemporaries, Andrea del Castagno, painted a typical Last Supper that effectively shows the problems of an unrealistic portrayal, lack of emotion, and faulty perspective and composition that were common to pre-Leonardo Last

Supper's. The following paragraphs reveal these faults and the changes da Vinci made to earn him the distinction of painting a theme "that has always been recognized as the first classic statement of the ideals of High Renaissance painting."

Castagno positioned the figures in a way that leaves viewers with a growing suspicion that everything was just a bit too planned out. Glaringly obvious symbolism shows the apostles and Christ primly sitting in front of their plates with large, golden halos attached to their heads. Much in the way 33 rpm records sit on a turntable. Another deliberate move was that Judas was physically ostracized from the group by being seated on the opposite side of the table. This doesn't make sense because no one would know Judas was the traitor before the treason was committed! In fact, Castagno eliminates all physical contact among the apostles (except for John who leans on Jesus symbolizing his status as the most beloved), thus also eliminating reactions to Jesus' statement, "One of you shall betray me." There is "very little communication among the apostles—only a glance here, a gesture there—that a brooding silence hovers over the scene."

The breakdown of communication is accompanied by an absence of emotion. Flimsy hand motions and nods simply cannot portray the shock, anger, and fear that the twelve men must have felt. Their calm faces stare off into space; they are like human vegetables.

Not only do the actual figures of the painting affect the impressions of the viewer, but the overall composition (the direction the design leads the eye) and the perspective (techniques to make the design look three-dimensional) of the

background in the Last Supper can repel or draw in the person looking at it. Because Castagno followed the rigid demands of tradition, his perspective and composition give the weird effect of real, round people stapled onto a paper cutout. The flat perspective makes the room shallow yet oppressive at the same time because of the flowery designs painted on the walls. It's hard to decide whether or not to look at the people or the pillars. An observation that helps to pinpoint the problem is "the perspective space has been conceived automatically. It was there before the figures entered and would equally suit another group of diners." The composition pulls the eye straight across the picture horizontally—right down the row of disciples. Jesus is skipped over because he looks like everyone else, just a little holier. Judas is the attention-grabber because he sticks out as the oddity with no halo and on the wrong side of the table. This creates conflict because the viewer sympathizes with Jesus but is impelled to look at Judas.

Painted in the dining room of the Dominican friars at S. Marie delle Grazie, Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper was the cause of considerable controversy. He was slighted for challenging the methods of other established masters, and he was exalted as a genius for solving the creative and technical difficulties encountered by such artists as Castagno.

Da Vinci's first change shows the action as if it were a real life situation. He immediately ditched the halos, portraying all of them as real and feeling men. Next, Judas is sitting undiscovered along with the rest of the disciples—not physically

separated but psychically isolated through subtle symbolism. Judas' worried face seems to be in shadow; his elbow knocks over a dish of salt (bad luck), and he clutches his bag of "blood money," thus showing he is the bad guy without an outright statement. The apostles are separated into triplets that display the excited communication among the individual groups of three men as well as flailing arms gesturing to other groups. There is a "general, strong reaction to Christ's prediction of betrayal."

The set up for communication is also an ample stage for displaying feelings. Da Vinci really plays up the emotional drama by assigning a specific emotion to each face as they demand to know who the traitor will be. A few of the primary expressions are faith and devotion represented by Philip, courage by James, doubt shown by Thomas, love represented by John, anger by Peter, and deceit by Judas. Jesus is the only one that stays calm.

Along with the down-to-earth realistic approach and the inventive trick to expose emotion, da Vinci's perspective and composition are very effective. The sense of depth is greatly increased, making it look airy, like a real room. There is probably enough space to hold a short foot race if they all jumped over the table. Though there is a fair amount of background area, it doesn't overpower or detract from the scene because it is so sparsely furnished and has plain walls. That same setting with another, different group of people would lead some people to think that the place had been burglarized. "The perspective framework of the scene is almost entirely depending on the figures, rather than as a pre-existing structure." The composition of Last Supper

provides a new focus for the viewer. By grouping the disciples as previously mentioned, da Vinci started a rhythm that moved from the perimeters of the painting to always end up in the middle. The direction their eyes look and the way their bodies lean lead the eyes directly to Jesus (who is structurally different because He is alone). The lightest point in the whole picture is the window at the back of the room that is directly behind Christ. Anyone's eyes are automatically drawn to that "bright" spot and to Jesus' face.

Most people are familiar with the theme of the Last Supper; it can be found in churches and homes everywhere. However, only Leonardo da Vinci is represented because of the obvious qualities that make his work so much better than the other versions. An adult I was explaining this topic to exclaimed, "I never knew that there was any other way to paint the Last Supper. I only just knew da Vinci's way." That general statement proves da Vinci's superiority—it has made him famous through the ages.

Henry

In the course of Henry's battles and experiences in the Civil War, as portrayed by Stephen Crane in The Red Badge of Courage, Henry changed in many ways. The differences aren't obvious until Henry mulls over his feelings in the final chapter, but at that point many conclusions can be drawn.

While still at his homestead, Henry saw the war as romantic and heroic. He also envisioned himself as a future hero so he enlisted only to discover that his participation was only a dull routine of waiting for battle. To make his field experience worse, horror stories from the front line psyched Henry out, and he feared that he would fail in meeting a courage quota. Henry found that his self-assurance was shot through. "He was forced to admit that as far as war was concerned, he knew nothing of himself."

The status of being considered brave was significant to Henry because he thought that he could only be a man if he bared his teeth and confronted his enemies. When he ran from his first battle in fear, he knew in his heart that he had failed and people would forever consider him "yellow." Though he rationalized his actions, his flight actually helped him because he saw the perspective of a coward. He watched as men charged forward, retreated in defeat, and died in anguish. Henry realized that though man was destroying man, nature didn't care. The sunset was magnificent as usual even though the battle field was covered in blood. This made Henry realize that he was an insignificant pawn in the war effort and that brute force would not prove that he was a man. In the end, Henry said, "...and he would be taught to deal gently and with care—he would be a man."

After Henry found Jim Conklin and the tattered man during his A.W.O.L. disappearance, critics who believe in spiritualism claim that Henry was morally uplifted and reminded of his obligation to the war by Jim's death because Jim died as a result of a recent

battle. This is quite untrue, however, because Henry didn't return to his field unit through his own motivation but because he was led there by the cheerful man that had joined him from the retreating regiment of wounded soldiers. What Jim's death possibly taught him was how to cope with the loss of a friend. Unfortunately, Henry didn't handle it well and took out his anger and frustration on the tattered man by abandoning him on some unused railroad tracks. Once returned to camp, Henry was made aware that he was still insignificant when the commanding officer called him a "mule-driver." However, he distinguishes himself in subsequent battles as a rifleman, becomes a flag-bearer after retrieving the Union flag from enemy ground, and even receives praise from a general.

Later, while contemplating his war experiences, he understands what the word "hero" means. It's not so grandiose as imagined, but Henry's satisfied with his small recognition and his renewed sense of courage. More importantly, he acknowledges that the real sufferings of others are more intense than his accidental wounds (such as his head injury from the butt of his comrade's gun). This is illustrated by "He found that he could look back upon the brass and bombast of his earlier gospels and see them truly."

Henry's exposure to the brutalities of the Civil War changed him dramatically from a naive farmer to an experienced soldier, yet he retained his human emotions despite the difficulties he faced. His war experience caused him to mature quickly and come to terms with life and death, and, in that respect, Henry changed a lot.

Readers' Comments on Leah Rader's Portfolio

Readers especially admired the reflective letter, particularly its start. "By opening with a dream," one reader said, "the writer puts us in her world immediately, and so establishes her voice, her process, her portfolio." Another called the letter "engaging" and applauded the writer's "mature ability to reflect upon her own writing." The conclusion of "Grandma's Closet" also earned praise: "this story really takes off at the end, when it moves us from the familiar to the unknown, from simply traveling to dancing for the dead." Readers also liked the psychological probings in "Henry" and the clarity and confidence of "The Last Supper Comes In First." One said, "I didn't even need to have the pictures in front of me to understand."

Portfolio by Elizabeth A. Stager

Kettering Fairmont High School
Kettering, Ohio

Author's Introduction

I am Elizabeth Stager. My parents are Bill and Barb; my sister is Emily. I attended Kettering Fairmont High School in Kettering, Ohio, and my present major is Broadcast Journalism. Those are just the facts.

I am eighteen—ecstatic one moment, thunderstorm-depressed the next. I love books and words. I am a gypsy poet on the inside...at least I long to be. Sometimes I fear I am Just-Me. But I suppose even so there are still trees to smell and shadows to walk through, and friends and boys' smiles and lakes. Slowly I learn that it will be okay to be Just-Me.

I love music. In high school I sang in show choir and played in musicals. Once I was the star of Mame, and it was wonderful fun to be the star. Everyone should have the chance.

I don't suppose I've had any sensational life experiences. How many of us ever do? Maybe life in itself is experience enough.

Reflective Letter

Dear Readers,

I have always taken advanced English courses with a few extras like journalism and creative writing thrown in. I suppose I understand about as much about composition as any other student at this point in her career. I've got the five-paragraph essay down like rain. I know not to tell but to show, and I know how to scatter my adjectives evenly.

What I am beginning to learn is that all of that is meaningless without my voice. If the author doesn't speak, then

the words are just words, and they will lie there on paper forever

My greatest writing vice is fragments—I adore them—you'll see. Perhaps I could write topic, major, minor, minor, major, minor, minor, major, minor, minor, conclusion. But if I did all that and I still didn't let you see the beauty of the child I was describing, the words are rubbish. I'm trying to temper my fragments, but I need them; I won't trash them for good.

My first piece, "Katie's Time," was hard to begin. Katie's death slapped me and the scar was deeper than I thought. It took a long time for me to be able to really think it through. I spent pages of journal writing trying to come up with my big life-meaning paper. When I finally began it with the simple truth that Katie was dead, everything came out. It was a healing paper.

Lately, I notice so many of my classmates writing about life and meaning and religion. We are all so alive and aware and curious and yet wise. We know so little, but we want to know, and that is enough. These are my life papers. Each one taught me something as it left my pencil; I will try not to forget.

Liquid Black

The electricity was out. Not just in our house but all around the lake. Spots of light flickered behind the dark patches we knew to be trees; we made our way down to the lake by flashlight.

On the dock we found a sort of cradle, a harbor from the darkness, and yet a place at one with it. The warm soft boards of the pier were comforting in their solidity. An old worn hand sheltering us and holding us up. We crowded in a circle underneath LauraLe's big Indian blanket. Robby was there, and Tommy. Me, Danny, Laura, LauraLe, Adam. All of us in a circle on the dock.

At night there are no waves on the lake, but somehow we could hear its presence in the heavy quiet, and in the way our voices sounded. Quiet, dulled, barely echoing. A motor boat purred along the opposite shoreline, its green warning light twinkling faintly. Long moments later, its tiny wake kissed the beams beneath our dock.

There was no horizon, no lake meeting trees meeting sky. Only black. We knew the lake was below, and yet...It wasn't really the lake. An invisible but always present pool of black. Our commonplace lake, shaded in mystery.

It grew colder, we bundled closer. A fish jumped. I imagined his blue-silver skin flitting through the endless blackness. Perhaps he could not see horizon either; perhaps he wondered just how impossible it really was to swim from his blackness into the same black in which we sat. Was he surprised to feel cold air, not his own safe warm water?

We talked of school and classes and of God. The Creation. Sitting there in our nothingness it seemed important to speak of the way we had become somethings, so many things, out of a same nothingness. And although we spoke, in a way, the whole lake was silent. We were the only ones.

Stars came out, diamonds rather, on a blue black velvet pillow. Their light turned our darkness into more shades of

black, gave everything an end and a beginning. One of the diamonds tore across the sky, ripping the velvet. For an instant.

"Did you see...?"

"Hey..."

"Look! God..."

We were awed. Put in our tiny places by a twinkling, laughing, shooting star. And then we laughed too and waited for more.

It was too early in the year to really see the Northern Lights, but pale elegant fingers of color gently cupped the sky. Appearing so slowly and delicately, it was as if they had not appeared at all, rather drifted there for always. Green and lavender and morning-sun yellow, like water colors spread too thin and washed with too much water. Seeping into the paper that was night.

Another shooting star, another fish jumped. Trying to catch the falling diamond.

We stopped talking, breathed in the hazy damp blackness, blackness smelling so strongly of pine and water and sand I could taste it. Like flavored ice, slipping down my throat. Down, down, into my fingers and my toes.

We sat there forever, until our limbs were as old and stiff as the planks beneath us. Our skin melted in the dark, and we were so much a part of the beauty.

Way down the lake at the boys' camp the lights blinked on, and one by one by one the shore lights, the house lights, the people lights, invaded, pierced the black.

Katie's Time

A year ago this month, my friend Katie Haas died in a car wreck; I changed. In a way, she changed me.

Katie wasn't a close friend, but she was a friend, and she was my age. Young, healthy, happy. Immortal. But not so immortal after all. She is gone. Gone for always. How can something so vibrant and beautiful, so alive—be so suddenly and horribly gone?

People say Katie had so much to live for, meaning that she was going to college, planning a career, building a future. I know Katie had so much to live for simply because she was living. But she didn't have time to dream in the foggy shadows of Stonehenge or get sunburnt under an Egyptian sky. She had stories to tell and hear, laughter to share. She was a definite part of this world, this world of love, hate, and knowledge, a world she only partly got to know.

It seems unfair that each of us is given such a very short time to use what is our life, yet it is unforgivable that Katie be torn from her own tiny share so abruptly. She did have a chance, but it wasn't enough. Not nearly enough.

I cannot stop myself from thinking of all that she would've known and felt—of all the important things that she has missed.

But then, will I ever feel, know, discover all of these things? If I live to one hundred and twenty, will I ever really be finished, be ready to leave?

Absolutely, completely not. Can any of us simply dismiss our life, relinquish our just place in the universe? For that is what it boils down to. Our place, our niche, our tiny tiny almost invisible spot in the universe. That spot that almost doesn't matter but does most essentially. That one bit of space that each

of us takes up. With our name on it, our breath in it, our souls spun through it. It is that which proves we are here, that we exist, that we are a part, however small, of the black vastness of space. And it is that space which entitles us to all that we can find and make ours. Find, make ours, keep.

That is what I want, what Katie should've had. Time. Enough time to find everything there is to find and weave it into my being.

Grown-ups say "live each moment to the fullest," say it almost with regret. I say that doesn't mean some full moments won't be full of pain. At least tears are proof that I am still here. That I'm living, even more, that I'm alive.

When I was little I thought that eventually I would experience all the things I'd read in books. I couldn't wait to become a little princess and wondered long hours what it would be like to be a spider or a pig. Of course I'll never literally know, but some days I can almost feel my silver silk swaying in a tiny wind.

My English teacher tells our class that we read to be taken away. Away, out of the hot, gray cement classroom into something more exciting, or more beautiful, something different. And then to grab the knowledge of these somethings and store them away.

Books share with us new emotions and thoughts, ideas. Music, too, and art. I have strolled through lavender mist French gardens with Monet and have sung perhaps too many war songs, weeping for dead soldiers.

In a way, it's cheating time. It's getting so much more into our spot than we could ever really have time to gather. It's stealing that hot pain only thrown off by a play or film too painfully beautiful and making that ripping beauty ours. Having every right to it only because it is a piece of our world, a piece

of us before we grasp it wholly.

Possibly that's why I feel so guardedly jealous of my friends and teachers and family. I am so afraid that our lives will separate before I have taken all I can from them, before I have offered all I have to give them.

Once I was afraid to love because I thought that if I gave away too much of my heart, I could never get it back. Now I realize that loving is sharing what is me and receiving everything that makes up another human being, another life.

Maybe I want to be a reporter because I like to write. Or maybe it is because I want to snatch up bits of the world, seize more life for myself, give more life to others. Every tenth of every second there is pain and war and rejoicing. There is LIFE going on. We have a chance to make it a part of our own. Better, we have the chance to be a part of it. And then maybe we are immortal.

Our Life is not Life

Our life is not life, save in the intense
instant that whips the flesh like a lightning flash
that floods the spirit with the light of stars
and burns and strews it like a grain of incense.

-Francisco A. DeIcaza
Translated by Samuel Beckett

Long ago, I began the search for meaning. Every once in a while, when the moon is especially perfect, I read this poem, and for a second, I understand. In lines just as brief as the intensity he describes, Francisco DeIcaza captures all that is reason for persisting, existing.

Life is a wonderful thing to be loved. Yet litter is never beautiful nor is pneumonia. DeIcaza speaks of that instant when something hits the mind or the heart or the soul, and everything is clear. The instant on the lips when a kiss is not mere physical contact, but a melting shapeless placeless feeling—that is life.

When the heartbeat quickens or a melody shivers the skin, those are the moments that are true. Deja Vu belongs here. How to describe that dizzying second? When your life is familiar to you and the ages seem to be, as they ought, intertwined... I recognize a stranger's face in a sad, brief glance; it is comforting. Perhaps we do belong.

"The intense instant...that floods the spirit with the light of stars" is what we dream for, is why we take the dirty subway

and do not argue. If you have stood on a roof and drowned in witch-pitch black night or have bathed in Mozart or have loved something for always—you do not see the dust in the corners of the world or in the wrinkles on your hands.

There exist moments that pour into humans a golden holiness, a perfection that is starlight. A "flood," that erases the remembrance of our crimes and trivialities, that can stop time.

The soul dances until the instant "burns and strews it like a grain of incense." And like the grain of incense, we are left with only the memory of the sweet perfume and the echo of a light.

Readers' Comments on Elizabeth A. Stager's Portfolio

"This portfolio glows with life," one reader wrote, "a pleasure to read." The reflective letter was praised for its wit, humor, self-knowledge, and risk-taking ("I adore fragments"). Readers liked "Liquid Black" because of its various voices and its extraordinarily effective use of fragments, and they applauded "Katie's Time" for the structure and rhythms of its sentences; one reader said that "repetition is used effectively, even poetically. What a good ear!" According to another reader, the textual analysis "reads like a prose poem and makes me think in new ways." Overall, the readers agreed that the writing shows both confidence and control, and demonstrates mastery of a variety of written assignments.

Appendix A: 1990 Scoring Guide for Portfolios

General Directions: The portfolios should be read holistically and given a single comprehensive score on a six-point scale ("6" is high and "1" is low). In determining that single score, do not average the four pieces but judge the quality of the portfolio as a whole. In doing so, give greater weight to the longer and more substantial pieces, and reward variety and creativity. Please consult the chief reader if you believe a portfolio does not meet the stated requirements or if for any other reason you have trouble scoring it.

6 A portfolio that is excellent in overall quality. These portfolios include four distinctive pieces, one from each assigned genre, that excel in several of the following ways. They demonstrate an ability to handle varied prose tasks with maturity and originality. Their ideas are fully developed. The writing is consistently well organized, specific, mechanically correct, and stylistically mature. There are strong signs of individuality and creativity such as a distinctive voice.

5 A portfolio that is very good in overall quality. These portfolios generally include four distinctive pieces, one from each assigned genre, that occasionally excel in some of the following ways. They suggest an ability to handle varied prose tasks with maturity and originality. Their ideas are well developed. The writing is generally well organized, specific, mechanically correct, and stylistically mature. There are some signs of individuality and creativity such as a distinctive voice.

4 A portfolio that is good in overall quality. These portfolios include four pieces, one from each assigned genre, that succeed in several of the following ways. They demonstrate an ability to handle varied prose tasks competently. Their ideas are developed but not as fully as in very good or excellent portfolios. While the writing is organized, it tends to be less specific, mechanically correct, and stylistically mature than the very good or excellent portfolios.

3 A portfolio that is fair in overall quality. These portfolios include four pieces, but it may be difficult to identify the four assigned genres. They meet with mixed success: they suggest rather than demonstrate an ability to handle varied prose tasks competently. There tend to be both strengths and weaknesses in development, specificity, organization, mechanical correctness, and stylistic maturity.

2 A portfolio that is below average in overall quality. These portfolios include four pieces, but it may be difficult to identify the four assigned genres. They only partially suggest an ability to handle varied prose tasks competently. There are weaknesses in organization, development, specificity, mechanical correctness, or stylistic maturity.

1 A portfolio that is poor in overall quality. These portfolios include four pieces but it may be difficult to identify the four assigned genres. There are few or no signs of an ability to handle varied prose tasks competently. There are major weaknesses in several of the following areas: organization, development, specificity, mechanical correctness, or stylistic maturity.

Appendix B: Description of Portfolio Contents

A portfolio consists of a completed cover sheet together with the following four (4) pieces of writing:

1. A Reflective Letter

This letter, addressed to Miami University writing teachers, introduces the student and the portfolio. It may describe the process used in creating any one portfolio piece, discuss important choices in creating the portfolio, explain the place of writing in the student's life, or use a combination of these approaches. The letter should provide readers with a clearer understanding of the student as writer.

2. A Story or a Description

This narrative or descriptive piece should be based upon the student's own experience. Its aim is to communicate an experience rather than to explain it. The writing will most likely be personal and informal. A short story is acceptable but a poem is not.

3. An Explanatory Essay

This essay should develop and clarify an idea or a concept. In style, it may be formal or informal, but it should have a central idea. Its aim is to be informative and enlightening: readers should know or understand more than before. A paper that explains a physical process—a "how-to" paper—is not appropriate. Neither is a research paper that merely assembles information from other sources and is not based on the student's own ideas. This essay may have been begun in a high school course other than English.

4. An Analysis of a Written Text

This essay should analyze a short story, novel, poem, play, or piece of non-fiction prose written by a professional, a classmate, or oneself. It may interpret all or part of the text, evaluate it, show how it works, explain its significance, compare it to other texts, relate it to personal experience and values, or combine these approaches. Even if some secondary sources are used, readers should come away with a strong sense of the student's own response to the text. [If the text is not commonly known, a copy of it should be included in the portfolio.]

Appendix C: Guidelines for Portfolio Submission

1. All materials must be mailed on on before June 3, 1991 by the student's supervising English teacher. The supervising teacher may be any English teacher the student has had for a course during high school. The supervising teacher will sign a statement on the cover sheet that, to the best of his or her knowledge, all writing in the portfolio is the student's. The student will sign a similar statement.

2. The items of the portfolio should be arranged in the following order: a) completed cover sheet; b) reflective letter; c) story or description; d) explanatory essay; and e) analysis of a written text.

3. The written work--not counting the cover sheet and not counting the draft material required by #4 below—should **in no case** exceed 12 typed, double-spaced pages (8.5 x 11'). Portfolios longer than 12 pages will not be read.

4. For any one piece, all draft material **must** be included (paper clipped at the end of the appropriate essay).

5. All items—except the draft material of item #4 above—must be free of teachers' comments, grades, and markings.

6. The student's name must not appear anywhere except on the cover sheet. All writing should have the title and the student's social security number in the upper right corner.

7. Individual pages for each item should be stapled together. The 5-item portfolio should be fastened with a paper clip. No folders, please.

8. Papers written in class or out of school are acceptable. Papers revised after being returned by a teacher are acceptable.

9. Students will be rewarded for originality and variety so long as the guidelines for the four pieces of writing are observed.

10. Cost for portfolio submission is $21. Students will be billed during the summer. Results will be announced in early July.

PORTFOLIOS MUST BE
POSTMARKED NO LATER THAN
JUNE 3, 1991

Send to

PORTFOLIO
Department of English
Miami University
Oxford, OH 45056
(513) 529-5221

Appendix D: Portfolio Cover Sheet
Miami University Writing Portfolio Program

To the Student: Complete the first half of this cover sheet (type or print) and give it to your supervising teacher along with your portfolio and a stamped 10" x 13" envelope addressed to Portfolio, Department of English, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio 45056.

Student's Name:

Social Security Number:

High School:

Home Address:

I pledge that all the writing included in the attached portfolio is my own.

Signature of Student _____

* * * * *

To the Teacher: If you believe the attached portfolio contains only the student's own work, please complete this form, insert it and the portfolio into the envelope provided, and mail it no later than June 3, 1991. Thanks!

Name of Supervising Teacher:

Teacher's Home Phone Number:

Teacher's Home Address:

To the best of my knowledge, the attached written work has been produced by this student.

Signature of Teacher _____

Portfolios must be postmarked no later than June 3, 1991